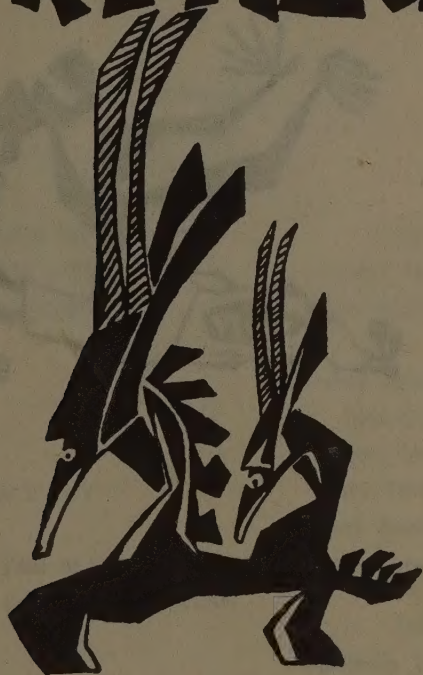


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AFRICAN GENESIS

There appears to be a widespread opinion that creation myths are rare among African traditions. The anthropologist Herrmann Baumann actually claims that the Negro is "devoid of the gift for true myth making". And Paul Radin states that "true creation myths are uncommon." Most collections of African folklore are limited in fact to fables and "Märchen"; even Frobenius's book entitled "African Genesis" is most disappointing in this respect, because all the creation myths therein come from North of the Sahara, while the Negro tales in the book are legends and fables rather than myths.

In reality, West Africa is as rich in creation myths as any part of the world. If anything, we find a greater diversity and richness of conceptions.

The very widespread idea that God created man out of clay is also found in West Africa, and the African variations on this universal theme are full of charm.

The Ewe of Togoland say that God uses two different clays to make men: when he wants to form a good man he uses only good, pure clay; but when he wants to fashion a bad person he uses bad clay. At the beginning he made a man and a woman. They looked at each other and began to laugh: whereupon God sent them into the world.

The Yoruba of Western Nigeria also say that Obatala (a sky god) formed men and women out of clay. But one day, the legend says, Obatala drank palm wine, and then he made Cripples, Albinos and blind people. Since then Cripples, Albinos and blind people are the special servants of Obatala and his devotees are forbidden to drink palm wine.

But not everywhere do we find this conception of creation. In some territories, as for example among the Kono of French Guinea God does not create man, but he generates him.

In other tribes again, strange forms of symbolism exist. One creation story of the Fan says that God made a lizard and put it in a pool of water. After seven days he called: "Come forth!" and instead of the lizard a man came out of the pool.

Frazer states that the story of a flood, which is found in all other parts of the world, is conspicuously absent from Africa. There is, however, a highly interesting myth among the Fan about a deluge of fire which is recorded by Blaise Cendrars in "Anthologie Nègre" (Correa 1947). According to this story, "Fan", the first man, was proud and challenged the overlordship of God.

God in a rage destroyed the world by fire, and created a new generation of men. But Fan having been created immortal, still tries wherever he can to do harm to mankind.

Sometimes the Christian or Islamic creation story is taken up and adapted by an African tribe. The following version of the Biblical creation story was told by an old pagan priest in Idah, a kingdom on the banks of the Niger in Northern Nigeria.

"At the beginning God created only one man and one woman. They lived happily at first, but one day when the man had gone out, the devil came and he tempted the woman. He said "Do you know where your husband is going when he leaves you? There is another woman whom he visits." But the woman said: "How can that be? I am the only woman whom God has created." Next time, when the man had gone out, the devil returned with a mirror. He showed her the mirror and said: "This is the other woman your husband is after." The woman got very angry when she saw her rival. So did the other woman. They quarrelled for a long time until the devil went away with the mirror. When the man came home, the woman started to quarrel with him. They both got very angry. There was a big palaver. Finally the man in his anger plucked a poisonous fruit which God had forbidden them to eat. He nearly swallowed it, but remembered in the last moment that the fruit was forbidden. So the fruit got stuck in his throat and can still be seen there. But the woman also plucked the fruit and she swallowed it. The fruit burst open her womb, and she began to bleed. From then on she began to bear children, and that is why there are so many people in the world."

Thus the fertile African imagination seizes even foreign material and recreates it. From the large number of original creation myths we present two of the most beautiful ones in this issue, the creation story of the Ijaw of Eastern Nigeria and that of the Kono of French Guinea.

The Ijaw story, which was recorded by Mr. Gabriel Okara, the poet, contains an idea familiar to several Nigerian tribes: that man decides his own destiny before he descends to earth to be born.

Both among the Yoruba and the Bini this idea is current. In most other aspects, however, this myth seems to be unique.

Equally beautiful is the creation myth of the Kono, first published by B. Holas in "Etudes Guinéennes" (1952). In this exciting story death appears at the beginning, and the world is created in the conflict between him and Alantangana. B. Holas explains in a very interesting commentary that Sa (death) and Alantangana form a kind of dual divine principle in this myth, that Sa is in fact the negative of the principle of creation and indivisible from it.

The poetic beauty of these two myths is unsurpassed in any folklore in the world.

ALATANGANA

THE KONO CREATION MYTH

RECORDED BY B. HOLAS

(Custom demands that the listener offers a Kola nut to the story teller.)

At the beginning there was nothing. In the darkness of the world lived Sa, death, with his wife and only daughter.

In order to be able to live somewhere, Sa created an immense sea of mud, by means of magic. One day appeared Alatangana, the God, in order to visit Sa in his dirty abode. Shocked by this state of affairs, Alatangana reproached Sa fiercely, saying that he had created an uninhabitable place, without plants, without living beings, without light.

To remedy these faults, Alatangana set out first of all to solidify the dirt. He thus created the earth, but this earth still seemed to him too sterile and too sad, and so he created vegetation and animals of all kinds.

Sa, who was satisfied with these improvements of his dwelling place, entertained great friendship for Alatangana and offered him much hospitality. After some time Atalanga, who was a bachelor, asked his host for the hand of his only daughter.

But the father found many excuses and in the end flatly refused to satisfy his demand. But Alatangana came to a secret agreement with the young girl and married her. In order to escape the wrath of Sa, the young couple fled to a remote corner of the earth. There they lived happily and had many children: seven boys and seven girls and among these there were four white boys and girls and three black boys and girls.

To the great surprise of their parents, these children spoke strange languages among themselves which their parents did not understand.

Alatangana was annoyed and finally decided to go and consult Sa. Without delay he set out on his way.

His father-in-law addressed him coldly and said: Yes, it was I who punished you, because you have offended me. You shall never understand what your children say. But I shall give your white children intelligence and paper so that they may confide their thoughts to it. To your black children, so that they

may feed themselves and procure everything they need I shall give the hoe, the matchet and the axe.

Sa also recommended to Alatangana that the white children should marry among themselves and the black children should do the same. Eager to reconcile his father-in-law Alatangana accepted all his conditions. When he returned he had the marriages of all his children celebrated. They dispersed to all parts of the world and engendered the white and black races. From these ancestors were born innumerable children whom we know today under the names of French, English, Italians, Germans etc. on the one hand, and Kono, Guenze, Manon Malinke, Toma Yacouba on the other.

But the world that had thus been peopled was still living in darkness. Once more Alatangana was forced to ask the advice of Sa. He commanded the "tou-tou" (an early-rising little red bird) and the cock to go and ask Sa's advice.

Having heard the two messengers, death told them: Enter the house. I shall give you the song by which you shall call the light of day so that men can go about their work.

When they returned Alatangana asked the messengers what news they brought. They said: It is not very clear, we did not understand what we were told.

Upon this Alatangana became angry and scolded them: I gave you money and I gave you food for your journey and you neglected your duty. You deserve death.

But in the end Alatangana mercifully forgave the two unhappy messengers. A little later the tou-tou gave its first cry and the cock too uttered his first song. And behold a miracle: hardly had the two birds finished their song when the first day rose. The sun appeared on the horizon and according to the directions of Sa started on its celestial course. When his journey was completed the sun went to sleep somewhere on the other side of the earth. At this moment there appeared the stars in order to give to mankind some of their light during the night.

Since that day the two birds must sing in order to call the light. First the tou-tou and then the cock.

Having thus given the sun, the moon and the stars to mankind, Sa called Alatangana. He said to him: The other time you took my only child away and in turn I did good to you. It is your turn now to render me a service: having been deprived of children, you must give me one of yours, any time I call for one. I shall choose them myself by letting them see a calabash rattle in their dream.

This shall be my call which they must always obey. Conscious of his guilt Alatangana could not but consent. And it is because Alatangana disobeyed the custom requiring the payment of bride price that human beings must die.

OGBOINBA

THE IJAW CREATION MYTH

RECORDED BY GABRIEL OKARO

There was a large field, and in the field stood a large Iroko tree with large buttresses. From the sides of the field appeared men and women in pairs. Each woman held a broom, and each man a bag. As the women swept the field the men collected the dirt into their bags. And the dirt was Manillas. Some collected ten or more Manillas, others none, and when the field had been swept clean, they disappeared back into the sides of the field, pair by pair. The sky darkened, and there descended on the field a large table, a large chair and a large 'Creating Stone', and on the table descended a large quantity of earth. Then there was lightning and thunder; and Woyengi (Our Mother) came down and sat on the chair and placed her feet on the 'Creating Stone'. And out of the earth on the table Woyengi moulded human beings. But they had no life and were neither man or woman and Woyengi, embracing them one by one, breathed her breath into them, and they became living beings. But they were still neither men nor women and so Woyengi asked them one by one to choose to be man or woman, each according to his choice.

Next Woyengi asked them one by one, what manner of life each would like to lead on earth. Some asked of her riches, children, short lives, and others, long and peaceful ones and all manner of things. And these Woyengi bestowed on them one by one, each according to his or her wish. Then Woyengi asked them one by one, by what manner of death they would return to her. And out of the diseases that afflict the earth, they chose each a disease. To all their wishes Woyengi said, "So be it."

In this group of newly created men and women, were two women. One of them asked of Woyengi rich and famous children, and the other asked for only powers, mystic powers that would have no equal in the world—and this woman was OGBOINBA. Both wished to be born in the same town.

Woyengi finally led these created men and women to two streams, streams flowing to the habitation of man. One was muddy and the other clean. Into the muddy stream she led those men and women who had asked of her riches,

children and all other worldly possessions. Into the clean stream she led the other men and women who had asked of her no material possessions.

And so Ogboinba and the other woman came to be born in the same town and became inseparable friends. They ate and played together, sharing all their secrets and grew up as children of the same parents. But Ogboinba was an extraordinary child. At that early age she could heal and cure and had second-sight. She understood the tongue of birds and beasts, trees, and even of the blades of grasses. She prophesied and performed things strange and wonderful. Her name at that early age became a by-word on every lip.

When Ogboinba and her friend came of age, each took to herself a husband. Soon Ogboinba's friend had her first child. But Ogboinba had no child and was not expecting any. Her powers however continued to increase. Her friend became pregnant the second time and soon delivered the second child. Still Ogboinba had no child but her fame went far and wide and she became the most sought after medicine woman of all time. In spite of this, she was worried. She felt her life bare—she wanted a child. She wanted children and yearned for them.

Her friend had more and more children according to what she had asked of Woyengi, and Ogboinba loved them all and took care of them with her mystic powers as if they were her own children. But she had no satisfaction from that. She wanted children of her own to care for. Her mystic powers however continued to increase just as she had asked of Woyengi. But there was no joy in her heart.

After a time, she could not bear it any longer and secretly resolved on a journey, a journey back to Woyengi to recreate herself. So one day, she went into her medicine room, where she also kept her mystic powers, and asked them one by one if they would accompany her on the journey she had resolved to undertake. All of them showed signs of their willingness to accompany her. But out of them all she only picked the most mystic powers and the most powerful medicines and put them into a bag. She then went to her friend and told her she was going on a short journey. When her friend heard this, she became aggrieved. For, since they came to know themselves as friends they had not parted, even for a day. So the prospect of not seeing Ogboinba for a day and more made her very sad. Her children too would then have no more protection. But Ogboinba assured her that even though she would be away the children would still be under her protection and that nothing would harm them. With this, Ogboinba took leave of her and started her journey to Woyengi.

So along a wide road Ogboinba walked with her bag of mystic powers and medicines slung over her shoulder. A wide road that led to a large sea. Between her and the sea was a forest, a mangrove forest where dwelled Isembi, the king of the forest. As she walked along, day and night without food or rest, she soon heard the noise of the sea, the waves breaking on the shore. With each forward step the noise came nearer. But Ogboinba, walked steadily along and soon reached the mangrove forest, the Kingdom of Isembi.

As she picked her way through the forest she heard a voice, a voice calling from behind. She turned, and it was Isembi. "Are you not Ogboinba I've heard so much about?" he asked raising his voice. Ogboinba replied, "There is only one Ogboinba in the world, and I am the one." "If you are," Isembi said, "You've not treated me well by not calling on me as the king of this place. We've all heard your fame and to find you here like this is an honour. Come with me to my house". So Ogboinba went with Isembi to his house and there was well entertained to a sumptuous meal and palm wine. After the entertainment, Isembi asked Ogboinba where she was bound for. In reply Ogboinba said, "I've not given birth to a child since I was married many years ago. So I'm going to Woyengi to ask her to recreate me." "Turn back from here," said Isembi "It's impossible to see Woyengi when you are yet alive. Your journey is vain, so turn back from here". But Ogboinba said her mind was made up and though she was yet alive, to see Woyengi she must. With that she left Isembi and his wife to continue her journey to the sea. But she only went a little way and came back to Isembi and asked him if he would try her powers with his. Isembi said he would not fight a woman and asked Ogboinba to go on her journey. Still Ogboinba insisted on the trial of powers, adding that though a woman she was challenging him. This enraged Isembi and he said, "Haven't you heard of my powers? I'm Isembi the king of the forest. How dare you, a woman, challenge me?" With this he went to his medicine hut. There, all his pots of medicine showed negative signs. But he was not to be daunted by such things where a woman was concerned. So, in spite of the warnings, he went out armed with such medicines and mystic powers that he required, to fight it out with Ogboinba.

Outside, he asked Ogboinba to try her powers on him first. But Ogboinba declined. She said that he Isembi, being the elder of the two, should try her first with all he had. Isembi, being anxious to do away with Ogboinba without any further delay, repeated his incantations. Immediately Ogboinba's bag became empty of all her powers. Her mystic powers and the powerful medicines had all gone! She at once repeated her own incantations circling round and round to counteract Isembi's powers. As she did so, her mystic powers and medicines returned to the bag, one by one. And when she came to the end of her incantation they had all returned to the bag and she was once more herself. Then she asked Isembi to try her with more of his powers. But Isembi had nothing more powerful than the powers he had already used on her, and asked her to try him with her powers if she had any. So Ogboinba started to repeat her incantations circling round and round. As she did so, all the powers and medicines of Isembi entered her bag one by one and Isembi himself fell down dead. Then she slung her bag over her shoulder and proceeded on her journey. But as she was leaving Isembi's wife called her to come back and wake her husband for her. Ogboinba did not want to go back, but Isembi's wife entreated and wept. This touched her heart, she being a woman with a husband herself, and Ogboinba went back and after repeating some of her

incantations Isembi woke. Then Isembi's wife further pleaded for the return of her husband's powers and medicines. But that Ogboinba said she would not do and left to continue her journey.

Soon, Ogboinba left the mangrove forest behind her and reached the town of Egbe by the sea shore. And as she passed by somebody hailed her from behind. She looked back, and it was Egbe. "Is that not Ogboinba I've heard so much about?" asked Egbe. In reply, Ogboinba said, "There is only one Ogboinba in the world, and I am the one." "Your fame has been here before you," continued Egbe. "Come to my house," he said. "I'm the king of this town and you can't pass like an unheard of person through my town. Come, I'll entertain you." Ogboinba went with Egbe to his house and there was well entertained with plenty of food and palm wine. After the meal Egbe asked Ogboinba what the object of her journey was. Ogboinba replied, "I've been married many, many years but have not had a child. I've not for once been pregnant; so I'm on my way to meet Woyengi to recreate myself." Egbe was astonished on hearing this and counselled her, "Turn back from here. No person who is alive ever sees Woyengi." But Ogboinba said that she had made up her mind to see Woyengi and there was nothing in the world to stop her. With that she slung the bag of powers over her shoulder and left to continue her journey. But she came back presently to Egbe and asked if he would like to try his powers with hers. Egbe was enraged on hearing this and was choked with anger. When he found his voice again he said with contempt, "Go your way, you are a woman." But Ogboinba would not budge and insisted on their trial of powers, their mystic powers.

Egbe had not been known to have refused a challenge from any living being and this, though from a woman, he would not now overlook since she insisted on it. So he said, "Come on, and let's see who's more powerful, you, a woman, or Egbe, the king of the town and the sea shore." With this he went into his medicine hut and armed himself with the most powerful medicines he had always used in overcoming all those who had come to challenge him. He came out and asked Ogboinba to try him first. But Ogboinba, as usual, refused and asked him to try her first with all he had. And Egbe, not wishing to make this a long argument, at once repeated his long incantations. As he did so Ogboinba's bag became empty of all her powers. All her powers plus those of Isembi she had acquired had been scattered away in all directions by Egbe's mystic powers. On noticing this, she at once repeated her counteracting incantations moving round and round in a circle. And as she did so, her own powers plus those of Isembi returned to the bag. When she found all the powers complete in her bag, she stopped her incantations and asked Egbe to try her once more with more of his powers. But Egbe had nothing more powerful than the powers he had already used and asked Ogboinba to try him with her own powers. So Ogboinba started her own incantations and before she had been half way through, all the powers of Egbe had entered her bag and when she stopped, Egbe fell down dead. With Egbe on the ground she left

to continue her journey to the sea with the bag containing her powers plus those of Isembi and now those of Egbe, slung over her shoulder. But Ogboinba had taken only a few steps when she heard Egbe's wife weeping and calling her to come back and wake her husband for her. Ogboinba taking pity on her went back and after repeating her incantations brought Egbe back to life. Egbe's wife again pleaded for the return of her husband's powers. But Ogboinba refused this request and resumed her journey to the sea.

And so Ogboinba came to the brink of a mighty sea. A sea that no living person had ever crossed. A sea with high waves breaking thunderously on the shore, a turbulent roaring sea. It struck terror into the heart of Ogboinba. But cross she must; there was no other way.

As she stood regarding the sea, it spoke! "I am the mighty Sea that no one ever crosses." Then Ogboinba with all the audacity at her command said, "I am Ogboinba, the only Ogboinba in the world, and am on my way to Woyengi. I must cross". The Sea replied, "I am the mighty Sea that no one ever crosses. I'll take you into my bowels if you dare." Ogboinba was terrified by what she heard. But she wanted a child and the only way to get it lay in her seeing Woyengi. Nothing would stop her.

Urged on by this resolve, she made for the sea and as her feet touched it, waves rolled towards her and submerging her feet, began to rise. Soon it was up to her ankles and then up to the knees. Fear gripped her. Ogboinba could not move herself, she was powerless, hopeless, and just stood there watching herself being swallowed up by the sea. It continued to rise and soon the sea was up to her waist. She raised her bag of powers above her head. Still the sea continued to rise and now it had come up to her chest. Still the sea rose until it came up to Ogboinba's chin. Then she cried out in fear. "O Sea, are you really the sea that no one crosses?" and repeated her incantations. As she did so, the sea immediately started to recede. Soon it had come down to her waist, then to the knees and then to her feet. So it continued to recede until the bed of the sea lay bare exposing the gods and spirits of the sea. Then Ogboinba, with her bag of powers, picked her way across. On the other side, she turned to the dry bed of the sea and commanding it back to its place, continued her journey.

The next Kingdom that she came to was that of the Tortoise. Tortoise was the king and lived with his parents Alika and Arita and his wife Opoin. Tortoise saw Ogboinba as she walked along and calling her, wanted to know if she was not the Ogboinba he had heard so much about. Ogboinba gave her usual reply, "There is only one Ogboinba in the world and I am the one." "Come, let's go to my house," Tortoise said, "We've heard so much about you and we all want to know you. Please come." So Ogboinba went with Tortoise to his house and there had food and palm-wine with the family. After the meal Tortoise, always curious, asked Ogboinba, "What has brought you over this side of the sea? No human beings live this side, pray, tell me, what has made you come like this?" Ogboinba replied, "I have had a husband for many years

but have not had a child, so am on my way to see Woyengi and ask her to recreate me." "Go back from here," Tortoise advised, "No one who is yet alive ever sees Woyengi." But Ogboinba said her mind was set on seeing Woyengi and that she would not turn back. Then Tortoise warned her. "Beyond me live the gods Ada and Yisa the great, the most powerful, who possesses two small 'creating stones'. Nobody ever goes that way. So end your journey here." But Ogboinba said nothing would stop her and shouldering her bag, which had now become quite heavy with the powers she had acquired on the way, left to continue her journey.

After going a little way she came back to Tortoise and confronted him with her usual request for a trial of powers. Tortoise did not take it seriously and asked her to go on the journey she had set her heart on. But Ogboinba insisted on their contest of powers. Then Tortoise began to boast, "Haven't you heard of me? My name has gone round the world for my mystic powers. If you really mean what you say, I'm ready for you." With this he went into his medicine hut and armed himself with his powerful medicines and mystic powers. When he came out Ogboinba asked him to try her first with his powers. But Tortoise said that could not be, for he was a man and besides he was the Tortoise. Still Ogboinba insisted on his starting the contest and so Tortoise began his incantations. As he repeated them Ogboinba's bag dropped from her hand to the ground and all the powers were dispersed to all the corners of the world. Ogboinba at once repeated her own incantations to counteract the powers of Tortoise. First the bag returned followed by the powers, one by one. When the powers had all returned Ogboinba asked Tortoise to try with more of his powers. But Tortoise had no more and asked her to do her worst if she could. So Ogboinba began her own incantations and before she had gone half way, Tortoise had fallen down dead and all his powers had entered Ogboinba's bag. With Tortoise lying on the ground Ogboinba shouldered her bag and made to continue her journey. But before she could take a step she was stopped by the weeping voice of Opoin the wife of Tortoise. Opoin begged her to wake Tortoise her husband for her. Ogboinba took pity on her and waking Tortoise with her mystic powers resumed her journey.

On and on she walked day and night, with her bag of powers over her shoulder. Soon she reached the kingdom of the god Ada. Ada, on seeing her, asked her if she was not the Ogboinba he had heard so much about. Ogboinba gave her usual reply. "There is only one Ogboinba in the world and I am the one." Ada said he would not allow her to pass on like that without entertaining her, she being such a famous person. So Ogboinba, as usual, went with Ada to his house and there was well entertained to a meal of yam, plantain and all other choice dishes that befitted a god and king to entertain a famous person. After the meal Ada asked Ogboinba, "What has brought you here where only the gods dwell? This place is virgin to the feet of human beings. No human being has been here before you; tell me, why have you come?" On Ogboinba giving the reason for her journey, Ada said, "Turn from here for no one ever

sees Woyengi, not even me." But Ogboinba would not turn, for her heart had been hardened by desire, desire for a child. So she told Ada she would not now turn and would continue her journey to Woyengi wherever she might be. With that Ogboinba shouldered her bag of powers and left to continue her journey. But she came back presently to Ada and asked him if he would try his powers with her own. Ada was surprised—a human being to seek contest of powers with a god! All he said was to ask Ogboinba if she really meant what he had heard her say. Ogboinba replied by repeating her request. Ada went into his medicine hut. But there, there the contents of all his medicine pots had turned to blood! "No," he said, "I won't heed this; she is but a human being". So heedless of the warning his medicines gave him, he came out and asked Ogboinba to try him with her powers. But Ogboinba refused and asked him instead to try her first. Ada, moved with anger, at once directed his powers on Ogboinba. Ogboinba fell down apparently dead. But she regained her consciousness after a while and began her own incantations. As she did so all the powers of Ada left him and entered her bag, and in the end Ada fell down dead. Once more victorious, Ogboinba shouldered her bag of powers and continued her journey.

On and on she walked, a lone figure on a wide road, until she reached the kingdom of Yasi, the great and powerful god. Yasi had seen her and had watched her progress a long way away even before she came within range of human vision. So as she wandered along on his territory Yasi asked her if she was not the Ogboinba he had heard so much about. Ogboinba gave her customary reply. "There is only one Ogboinba in the world and I am the one." Yasi said, "I am the king of this place; come and I'll give you food and drink." So Ogboinba went with Yasi to his house and there again was well entertained to a meal of rare dishes and palm-wine befitting a king to entertain a famous guest. After the meal, Yasi asked Ogboinba why she had come on her journey. Ogboinba told him, "I'm a woman as you see, and have been married many many years, but I am without a child. I've not even for once been pregnant. I am barren so am on my way to see Woyengi, and ask her to recreate me." Then Yasi said, "No living person ever sees Woyengi, so turn from here." But Ogboinba would not listen and said she would continue her journey. With that she shouldered her bag of powers and set forth. But she came back presently and made her usual request for a contest of powers. Yasi could not believe what he had heard and asked Ogboinba to repeat what she had said. Ogboinba repeated her request. Yasi then replied in anger, "I am the greatest and the most powerful of all gods. How dare you, a human being, a woman, throw a challenge at me for a contest of powers. Go your way, you're no match for me." But Ogboinba insisted on the contest. So Yasi in fury went to his medicine hut. But there the contents of his medicine pots had turned to blood! "This can't be." He whispered in surprise, "She's but a human being. She shall have the contest she wants," and taking the two small 'creating stones' came out and asked Ogboinba to begin. But Ogboinba, as was her wont,

refused and asked Yasi to begin. Yasi at once directed the force of his powers on her. Ogboinba's head was immediately severed and went up into the sky while her body remained standing, holding the bag of powers. Soon the head came down from the sky and rejoined the body and Ogboinba was once more whole and alive. Ogboinba then asked Yasi to try her with more of his powers; but Yasi having none more powerful than the ones he had already used asked Ogboinba to try him with her powers. So Ogboinba started to repeat her own incantations, moving round and round in a circle. The force of her powers also severed the head of Yasi from the body and it went up high into the sky. But his body remained standing on the 'creating stones' and Ogboinba noticing this, pushed it down on the ground. When Yasi's head came down from the sky there was no body for it to rejoin and it smashed itself on the ground. So Yasi the god was overcome and Ogboinba was once more victorious. But she would not move on without the 'creating stones' and made for them. She tried to lift them but found that they could not be moved, small as they were. For a moment Ogboinba was at a loss what next to do. Then she repeated some of her incantations and immediately she was able to move them and lifted them on to her shoulder. She then moved on, bent double, with the weight of the 'creating stones' and the bag of powers to the kingdom of Cock.

Cock, on spying Ogboinba from the roof of his house flew down and asked if she was not the Ogboinba every body even the gods had heard so much about. On Ogboinba giving her usual reply Cock said, "If you are the Ogboinba I've heard about, come in to my house and I'll give you food and palm-wine befitting me as king to entertain you." So Ogboinba, never refusing, went to Cock's house and there was well entertained to a meal of choice dishes and palm-wine. After the meal Cock asked Ogboinba the reason for her journey and she said, "I've been married many, many years but am without a child. I possess all the parts of a woman but I am barren. I am barren and so I'm on my way to see Woyengi face to face and ask her to recreate me." "Journey no further," said Cock, "No one ever sees Woyengi alive. Mine is the last kingdom. Beyond me is void; so turn back from here," Cock advised. But Ogboinba said she would journey on, and shouldering her bag of powers and the 'creating stones' took to the road. Presently she came back and asked Cock for a trial of powers. But Cock liked nothing better than a show of powers and at once began to boast. "My fame has gone round the world for my powers. I am the ruler of the first and the last kingdom of things that die. Come, and I'll show you my powers; nothing pleases me more." So boasting, Cock flew to the roof of his medicine hut and crew several times, summoning his powers. Then flying back, stood in front of Ogboinba and asked her to begin. But as was usual with her she refused and asked Cock to begin. Cock, not wishing to prolong matters, began with all he had at once. Immediately Ogboinba became bare of all powers and Cock noticing this, began boasting once more. "Mine's the first and the last kingdom of things that die. How can you stand my powers?" As he boasted thus, Ogboinba had repeated her own incantations and had got all

her powers back. She asked Cock to try her with more of his powers. But Cock said he had used all the powers he had and if Ogboinba had any powers to match his, it was now her turn to use them on him. As Ogboinba repeated her incantations, Cock's town suddenly burst into flames and burned down to ashes.

Thus with more powers in her bag, Ogboinba journeyed beyond Cock's town and kingdom, the last kingdom of things that die, to the large field. The large field with the large Iroko tree with the large buttresses. There she hid herself in the buttresses of the Iroko tree and watched.

Soon, men and women appeared in pairs from the sides of the field. The women carried brooms and the men, bags. As the women swept the men collected the dirt into their bags. When the field had been swept clean they disappeared back into the sides of the field, pair by pair. As she waited, she saw the sky darken and a table descend on the field followed by a chair and a large 'Creating Stone'. Then there was lightning and thunder. And Woyengi came down and sat on the chair and placed her feet on the 'Creating Stone'. Then on the table descended a quantity of earth and with it Woyengi went through her usual process of creation and led the men and women to the two streams, the streams that flowed to the habitation of man. Then Woyengi returned to the field and ordered up the table, the chair and then the 'Creating Stone'. These things went up one by one into the sky. And when Woyengi was about to ascend, Ogboinba rushed out from her hiding place and challenged her to a contest of powers. Then Woyengi said :

"I know you were hiding in the buttresses of the Iroko tree. I saw you leave your town on your journey to find me. I saw you overcome all living things and gods on the way with the powers that I gave you which were your heart's desire. Now it's children you want, and for that you have come to see me and to challenge me to a contest of powers. You have come to challenge me, the source of your powers, strong hearted Ogboinba.

I now command all the powers you acquired on the way back to their owners". Immediately Woyengi made this pronouncement, Isempi, Egbe, the Sea, Tortoise, the gods Ada and Yasi, and Cock, all had their powers back. And Ogboinba, overcome by fear, turned from the face of Woyengi and fled in panic to hide in the eyes of a pregnant woman she met on the way.

On seeing this Woyengi left Ogboinba alone, for a commandment she had given to men that pregnant women should never be killed—and she would not now violate it because of Ogboinba. So Woyengi turned and went up to her abode. But Ogboinba remained in hiding and is still in hiding not only in the eyes of pregnant women but in the eyes of men and children as well. So the person that looks out at you when you look into somebody's eyes is Ogboinba.

SIX CHANTS FROM THE CONGO

BY MIRIAM KOSHLAND

To translate songs from Kijeke into English is a difficult task. The African manner of self-expression is different from our own and the social background of the poems is different from ours. Also, some chants have come from Usumbwa, an older Kingdom than Bayeke (where Kijeke is spoken.) Most of these chants have their origin in Bayeke folklore, particularly those referring to the invasion by the Wangoni and the liberation of the country by the kings Mirambo and Shiyunzi. Some of the meanings are even lost to the Bayeke today. These songs are of course orally transmitted and those who tell them do not always explain them.

The first song is a joyful chant, where the Mwani (King) is called father of the people, chief of the caravans, and general of the army.

The second chant is a typical bard's song, addressed to the king. These songs may praise the king, give him advice, and ask for his help. They also tell of the dangers menacing the country so that the king can take precautions to avert them. These chants, old as they are, are still sung today. The words may be altered, but the rhythm of the music and the intonation are the same.

The third chant is a warning given to those who spread discord and feuds. Msiri's empire was very large and contained many different tribes and languages. His punishments were extraordinarily severe. In order to disclose a person's guilt one went to the fortune teller who used traditional means: he killed a chicken and examined it on the luhe (a rectangular wooden board upon which food is served to the Bayeke). If the bones of the dead animal showed black spots the accused was found guilty, if the bones were white, he was innocent.

The fear of public reproof has always been very strong in Africa. Women are careful in their duty towards their husband and hold him in great respect. Our fourth chant is an expression of this fear.

The fifth chant in this series was originally translated into French by Tristan Tzara and was published in "Dada", (Zuerich 1917). It was republished in "Musée Vivant", 1952. The original text is lost.

The sixth song is from a magical incantation used to deal with snakes. To give an idea of the sound pattern of these poems we print three of them in the original.

1. From time to time you come, O father,
 From time to time you come, O Nwenda,
 When you come, O head of the caravans
 You will give us magola (1)
 For all the country.
 When you will come, O general,
 You will give us magola,
 For all the country,
 From time to time, you will come, O father.

2. Nwenda, come back O king
 Then even the one who was a commoner
 Gets up now
 In this land; return
 O master Saidi, ai we!
 So many palavers during your absence
 So many tears among us,
 Extermination took place in Bunkeya,
 Ai we!

3. O little bird scattering discords
 Washing your claws
 Serpent biting
 From two sides, this behaviour
 Is bad. Son of Luku-ngunia
 And you, son of Kenzia
 Where shall we convince ourselves?
 We convince ourselves upon the luhe
 This behaviour is bad.

4. I have not milled (the maize)
 My husband went to sleep hungry
 Oh yes, this is very sad, O mother
 My husband criticised me,
 My husband went to bed hungry.

(1) Magola—a certain length of cotton material.

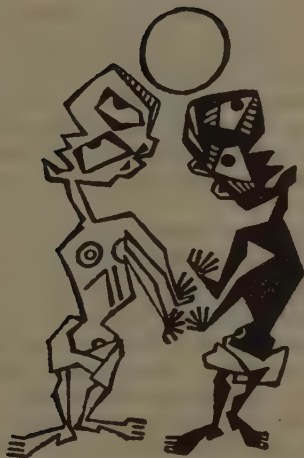
5. In the West the clouds vegetate
in the East they are scattered
flowers unfold
white cloud unfolds
mistletoe branches ooze
lightening falls on mistle toe branches
ooze ilbaratree tufted
killed
weeping
paralyzed.
Crushed fire extending
fire having watched fire extending
wood for the fire
bends expands
lightening
beats breaks
water on the surface of clay
where the clouds were together
roaring
continuously
lightening
thundering with spite.

6. Winding throwing forward
writhing throwing forward
skin of snake rising
to heaven rising
heart beats continuously
tail wants to exterminate
tail wants to exterminate
tail wants to move
trembling.

ORIGINAL TEXTS

1. Lindi Lindi.
Lindi, Lindi, tata wiza.
Lindi, Lindi, Nwenda, wiza.
Ulakaba wiza Mfundeba,
Ukatugabanya magola
Shalo shose
Lindi, Lindi, tata, wiza e!

3. Kanoni kasekembia
Kanoni kogan zala
Nzoka ya ndumina
Habili, lugendo ulu
Hululu. Mwana Luku-ngunia
Ni Mwana Kenzia.
Tulishinine mwande?
Tulishinine mu luhe
Lugendo ulu hululu.
4. Nabula kusekula
Mulume walala ni nzala
Mabulanda, mayo
Mulumbe wane mu kungamba
Mulume walala ni nzala e!



NÉGRITUDE

"Négritude" is a term created by the great Caribbean poet Césaire. It denotes a certain quality which is common to the thoughts and behaviour of negroes. It is an expression that was readily taken up by the French speaking poets from the Caribbean, from South America, and also from French West Africa. It stands for the new consciousness of the negro, for his newly gained self-confidence, and for his distinctive outlook on life, with which he distinguishes himself from non-negroes. All the poets from the various French speaking countries who meet in Paris have certain basic attitudes in common which they group together under this word "négritude". They are all regarding Europe as an "exile" and are highly critical of its culture. Africa to them is a dream land, a Paradise lost, and they try to rediscover in themselves certain traits or attitudes derived from long forgotten African cultures. The great French writer and philosopher Jean Paul Sartre has defined "négritude" thus:

"Black poetry . . . is functional, it answers a need which exactly defines it. Look through an anthology of white poetry of today; you will find one hundred different subjects according to the mood or the concern of the poet, according to his condition and his country. In this (anthology of Black poetry) which I present to you, there is but one subject which all try to treat, with more or less success. From Haiti to Cayenne, a sole idea — to make manifest the black soul. Negro poetry is evangelic, it comes bearing glad tidings—négritude is found again."

Here we reproduce six poems written in this new spirit. Guy Tirolen (Guadeloupe) attacks Western culture in "Prayer of a Black Boy." Through the voice of a little black boy who does not want to go to school he exposes the false respectability of Western life and its lack of poetry and vision.

In a sarcastic poem ("Balance Sheet"), Leon Damas (Guyana) accuses himself of being the "accomplice" of a foreign civilization. This civilization he despises, because of its artificiality of manners, its false sentiments and its "gigantic need for trifles." Another poem of Damas, "Black Dolls," is obviously written in exile. The poet thinks longingly of the "Black Dolls" he left behind in his native country; they symbolise to him all the warmth and humanity of his culture which he gave up "when the hour of uprooting came." He feels trapped, as it were, in the foreign culture, which is cold and inhuman. Europe too is symbolised by women in this poem: "pallid wenches, vendors of love, going and coming on the boulevard of my boredom."

This longing for Africa is also the subject of the two poems by Jacques Roumain. In "Guinea" he expresses the feeling of "belonging" to Africa; a feeling that is frustrated in this world but that may find fulfillment in death. In "When The Tam Tam Beats", the poet tries to establish a mystical union with his ancestors, in order to purify his soul from the "white man who made me mulatto." The fact that most Afro-American culture is a hybrid culture is finding here a painful expression.

The "négritude" of Aimé Cesaire, the most famous poet of this group is the special study of the article by Janheinz Jahn on page 32.

OUR SONG
BY ROUSSAN CAMILLE

In Dahomey,
on the Congo,
along the Niger,
my song had the leisurely rhythm
of gentle love.
the flowing sweetness
of good omens
and the relaxed pride
of virgin battles.

From southern isles
to the Nile
my song stretched
like a crystal stream.
But for three centuries
black vessels cut
with sharp-edged keel
through all the waters
of my trembling tunes.

Poisoned desires,
corpses of love,
the bones of dreams
and ashes and of swamps
fell from the black vessels
and disturbed the course of streams
that since have flown with longing
and with terror from the Atlantic
islands to the Mississippi.
And to unending pains.

BLACK DOLLS
BY LEON DAMAS

Give me back my black dolls
to disperse
the image of pallid wenches, vendors of love,
going and coming
on the boulevard of my boredom.

Give me back my black dolls
to disperse
the everlasting image
the hallucinating image
of overdressed and heavy marionettes
from whom the wind brings misery,
mercy!

Give me the illusion never to appease
the exposed need
of roaring demands
under the unconscious disdain
of the world.

Give me back my black dolls to play
the simple games of my instincts
to rest in the shadow of their laws
to recover my courage
my boldness
to feel myself myself
a new self from the one I was yesterday
yesterday

without complications
yesterday

when the hour of uprooting came.

Will they ever know this rancour of my heart
in the eye of my mistrust too late opened —
they have stolen the space that was mine
custom, days, life,
song, rhythm, effort,
pathways, water, home,
smoking grey earth,
wisdom, words, palaver,
ancestors,
cadence, hands, standards, hands,
trampling the soil —

Give me back my black dolls
my black dolls
black dolls
dolls.

*translated by
Miriam Koshland.*

BALANCE SHEET
BY LEON DAMAS

I feel ridiculous
in their shoes, in their dinner jackets,
in their stiff shirts, their paper collars,
with their monocles and their bowler hats

I feel ridiculous,
with my toes that were not made
to sweat from morning to evening
in their swaddling clothes that weaken my limbs
and deprive my body of its beauty.

I feel ridiculous
with my neck in the factory funnel,
with the headaches that only stop
when I happen to greet someone.

I feel ridiculous
in their parlours, with their manners,
with their courtesies and their etiquette,
with their gigantic need for trifles.

I feel ridiculous
when they chatter,
while they serve you that bit of hot water
with a cake on an afternoon.

I feel ridiculous
with their theories
which they adapt according to need and mood,
and according to their instincts
whom they leave open at night like doormats.

I feel ridiculous
as their accomplice, as their pimp
being one of them, the stranglers, whose hands are red
of the blood of civilization.

PRAYER OF A BLACK BOY
BY GUY TIROLIEN

Lord, I am so tired.
Tired I entered this world.
Far have I wandered since the cock crew,
And the road to school is steep.
Lord, I do not want to go into their school,
Please, help me, that I need not go again,
I want to follow Father into the cool gorges,
While the night is still hovering over magic forests,
Where spirits play before the dawn.
Barefoot, I want to tread the red hot paths,
That boil in midday sun,
And then lie down to sleep beneath a Mango tree.
And I want to wake up only,
When down there the white man's siren starts to howl
And the factory,
A ship on the sugarfields,
Lands and spits its crew
Of black workers into the landscape.....
Lord, I do not want to go into their school,
Please help me that I need not go again.
Its true, they say a little negro ought to go,
So that he might become
Just like the gentlemen of the city,
So that he might become a real gentleman.
But I, I do not want to become
A gentleman of the city, or as they call it
A real gentleman.
I'd rather stroll along the sugar stores
Where the tight sacks are piled
With brown sugar, brown like my skin.
I'd rather listen—when the moon is whispering
Tenderly into the ear of cocopalms, —
To what the old man, who always smokes,
Recites with breaking voice during the night.
The stories of Samba and master hare,
And many others more, that are not found in any book.
You know, my Lord, the negroes have had too much work already,
Why should we learn again from books,
About all kinds of things we've never seen?

And then, their school is far too sad,
Just as sad, as these gentlemen of the city,
These real gentlemen,
Who do not even know how to dance by the light of the moon;
Who do not even know how to walk on the flesh of their feet,
Who do not even know how to tell the tales of their fathers
By the light of the nightly fires.
O Lord, I do not want to go into their school again.

GUINEA

BY JACQUES ROUMAIN

That is the long way to Guinea —
Death leads you there.
There are the branches, the trees, the forest.
Listen to the rustling of the wind in its skeins
of eternal night.

That is the long way to Guinea —
your fathers wait with patience
by the wayside, they chat,
they wait.
This is the hour where the brooks are rattling
like rosaries of bones.

That is the long way to Guinea —
no brilliant reception is prepared for you
in the black country of black people:
Under a smokey sky, pierced by the shrieks of birds,
where around the eyes of swampy rivers
the trees open their eyelashes onto a decaying light,
there awaits you a quiet village
on the edge of the water,
the hut of your fathers and the family stone
on which your brow rests at last.

WHEN THE TAM-TAM BEATS
BY JAKUES ROUMAIN

Your heart trembles in the shadows like a face,
 reflected in troubled waters.
An old picture rises from the tomb of the night,
You feel the sweet magic of yore;
A river carries you away from the shore,
Carries you away into ancestral fields.
Listen to the voices. They sing of the sadness of love
And on the mountain, hark! the Tam-Tam beats
Like the breast of a dusky girl.
Your soul is reflection in whispering waters, where
 your fathers inclined their dark faces.
Hidden movements merge you with the waves
And the white man who made you mulatto
Is nothing but foam; like spittle cast up on the coast.



WENGER

AN EXAMPLE OF AFRO-EUROPEAN CULTURE CONTACT

The 'discovery', in 1907, of negro art by a group of Paris artists, was the first really important Afro-European culture contact. For two hundred years African carvings had been known in Europe, but had been treated as curios and were now suddenly valued as works of art. It was no accident that the discovery came at this particular moment in the development of European art, because the European artist was then fighting to free himself from the shackles of his own traditions. Ever since the Renaissance the arts in Europe had suffered from serious misconceptions. The newly discovered scientific spirit had been so powerful that it caught hold even of the artists. Anatomy and perspective became pre-requisites of art so that art became more and more a statement of superficial fact concerned with appearances. Art itself had become materialist. But materialism was carried to such absurd lengths in this century, and led to such catastrophies, that the artists were shaken out of their complacency and set out to rediscover the values that had been lost. In an intellectual revolution they freed themselves from all traditions, enabling them to "make visible the invisible". Mere representation was rejected as a worthwhile aim of the artist and he attempted once more to become an interpreter of the world. He claimed the liberty to invent freely and distort organic forms deliberately for his own purposes.

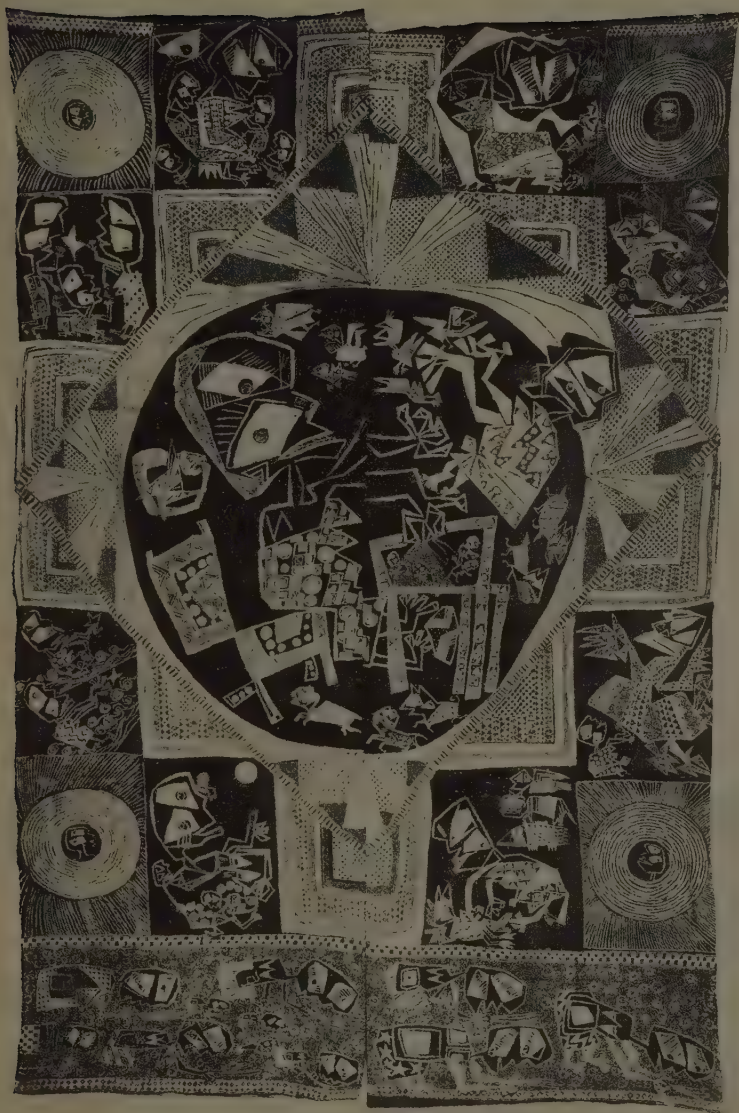
At this stage, the European artist found confirmation in African art. It was to him a discovery of tremendous importance that there were in fact entire cultures who had been using and inventing forms in exactly this way for centuries. These artists were, however, concerned only with forms. Picasso, in his 'negro period', was not interested in the philosophy that had produced negro art. He borrowed forms, but did not try to come to grips with the foreign culture. This aspect of the artistic revolution at the beginning of the century did not really bring us closer to Africa, but its importance (in this context) lies in the fact that for the first time it acknowledged the greatness and importance of 'primitive' art. Up till then the word 'primitive' had been used as a derogatory term and nobody had ever supposed that Africa had any enlightenment to offer. In 1911 Frobenius stated that "The concept of the 'barbaric negro' is a creation of Europe", and this marked the beginning of a gradual process of revaluation.

It is in much more recent times that Africa's potential contribution to our culture has been perceived, and since the second world war a new attitude is evolving. The least sensitive person in Europe must suffer a sense of disillusionment to observe the consuming obsession with technical progress. Our world has, to repeat Senghor's phrase, "died of machines and cannons". Essential human values seem to have been lost and our society stifled by an entirely wrong sense of worth. It is with relief that many intellectuals on the European continent turn to the poetry of Césaire, who shouts, "Hurray for those who never invented anything!" Nor is it by chance that Negro poetry is a success in Germany; it is part of a widespread desire to re-establish the significance of the irrational forces in life and to break away from our overestimation of tangible achievement. It is a desire to rediscover mystery in a world that has become bleak and barren. The new interest in Africa is a search to find again vital human qualities that have been submerged in our mechanical civilization, but preserved in the so called 'primitive' cultures. Senghor is a prophet of this new movement, saying, "We are the leaven that the white flour needs".

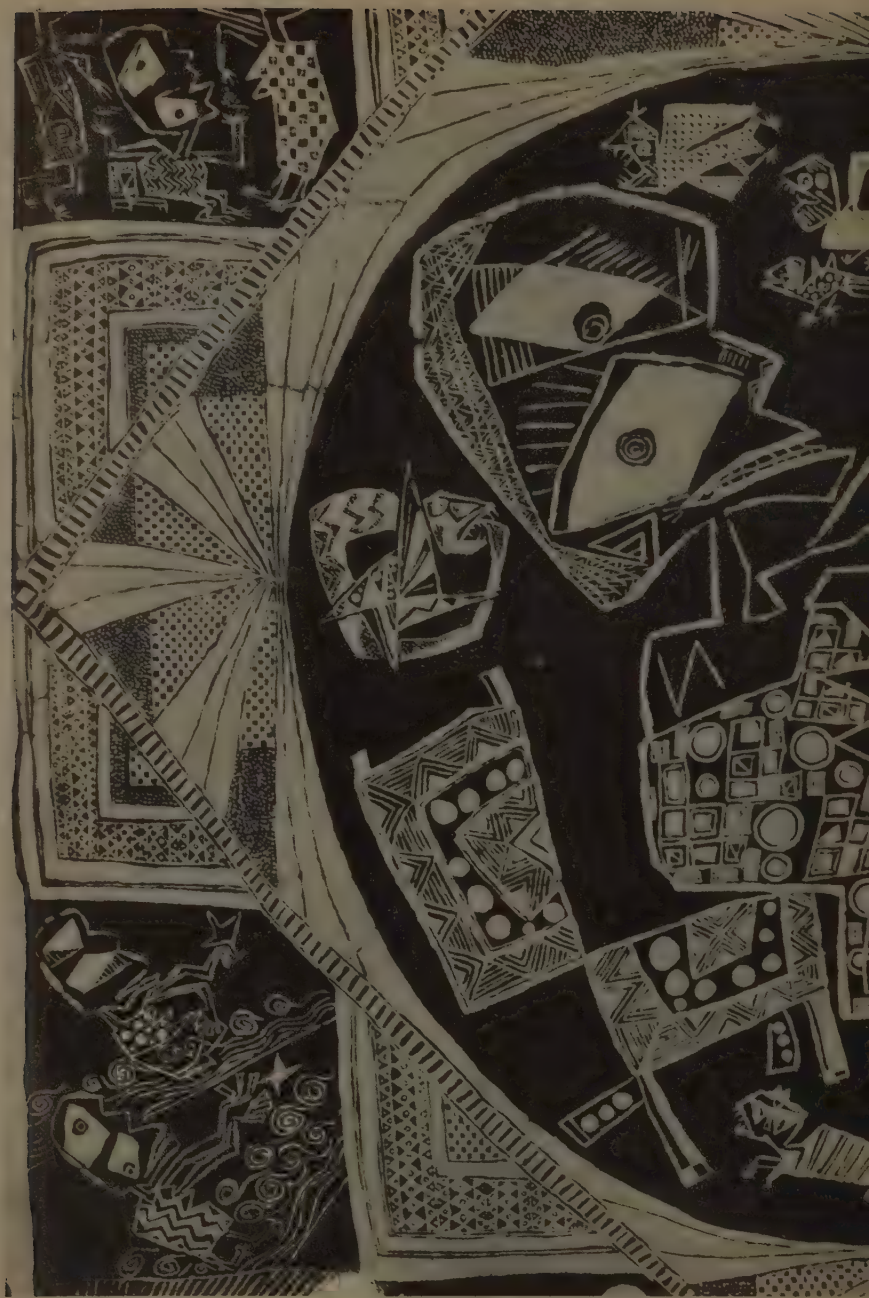
There is a new type of European now who no longer wants to study the foreign culture but to experience its philosophy, and from the deeper comprehension of the meanings of life revealed to him he is able to reevaluate his own concepts. There is Father Tempels, (*La Philosophie Bantou*), Pierre Verger, (*Les Dieux d'Afrique*), or Maya Deren, (*The Divine Horsemen*), to mention three who have written of their experiences, but it seems certain that no European has ever penetrated more deeply into the mysteries of traditional African life than the painter Wenger.

Susanne Wenger is Austrian by birth and she received her art education in conventional institutions including the Wiener Kunstakademie. She was a founder member of the Viennese Art Club with whom she exhibited regularly every year. But early on she found herself dissatisfied with life in Europe and particularly with its artistic developments. Refusing to be identified with any of the 'isms' she went her own solitary way searching for the basic symbols of life. She was at the time strongly attracted to the study of folk-lore and the psychology of Jung which is reflected in her Viennese pictures.

After a brief stay in Paris she found her way to Africa in 1950. The impact of this new world on her life and her art was tremendous. For here she found that symbolism was a live thing, by which whole communities organized their lives, and that mythology—far from being buried in the books of scholars—was the criterion by which traditional African societies interpreted life. Coming from tired, disillusioned Europe, she stumbled on a world where fact meant nothing and meaning everything; a world which was not interpreted through logic but through poetry. For a supersensitive artist who had been vainly searching for such values in sophisticated postwar Vienna, this came as a revelation. The complete upheaval caused by the experience became clear when she brought back to Paris in 1954 large excited canvasses, vibrating with tension and loaded with intensity which took the fashionable unaccustomed audiences unawares.



"Ogboinba". A Batik representing the Ijaw Creation Myth
By Susanne Wenger (Details On Following Pages)







Her decisive development came, however, on her return to Africa. Having digested the first turbulent experience she now desired to penetrate deeper into the culture which had impressed her, to understand and experience it from the inside. She was readily accepted by the pagan priests in the Yoruba village where she settled, because they instinctively grasped her sincerity and admired the great psychic power which she was able to release into the experience. Other Europeans had been made 'honorary' members, as it were, of Yoruba cults, but Susanne Wenger is unique in her position as a genuine priestess of the cult of Obatala, the Yoruba creator god. For some time now she has been functioning in this office and this absorbing experience has found fresh expression in her art. In her new life she found the technique of oil painting too artificial, too remote from the people whose lives she shared. She therefore adapted a local 'batik' technique to her own purposes.

The Yoruba batik technique is called 'adire'. It consists of painting a pattern with starch and then dyeing the cloth in indigo. The starch acts as a resist and when the cloth is washed after dyeing and the starch removed, the pattern appears in white. Yoruba women are using the 'adire' technique to dye their wrappers, but they restrict themselves mainly to geometrical or highly stylized patterns.

Susanne Wenger, adapting this traditional technique for her own ends, has produced enormous tapestries, representing scenes from African mythology. These batiks, first seen in Paris in 1956, show a long development from the exhibition of paintings in 1954. The violence of the experience is still there, but it has now been clarified and organised in bold forms. The batiks are executed with a sureness of touch and an artistic conviction that makes criticism on technical grounds irrelevant. It is a matter rather of accepting the batiks and the philosophy they present as inseparable. They may be frightening to some and rejected by others, but as a statement of the world they represent they are absolute. But while she draws her inspiration from African mythology and philosophy Susanne Wenger is not influenced by African art as such. She does not draw on Yoruba woodcarving, as Modigliani drew on Ivory Coast masks. She is not an artist experimenting with foreign forms; her relationship to Africa is a matter of a basic attitude to life. The one thing she has in common with the group of 1907 is that her contact with Africa helps her to find the real values buried in the materialism of our century and to join in the protest of all great modern artists against it.

Susanne Wenger has been rightly called the European counterpart of Senghor, because in her, as in the great poet, two cultures are a perfectly blended synthesis. This does not mean, however, that she is a missionary for her cultural concepts. Her art does not preach, she pursues no deliberate cultural or ever artistic ends. Her art grows; it grows out of the excitements of her everyday life among the worshippers of Obatala and as a projection of this experience it gives her work a unique place in European art.

AKANJI.

AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

BY JANHEINZ JAHN

There is hardly another poet of international stature who has been shaped to such an extent by the landscape of his native country. Exposed to the daggers of the tropical sun, battered by the Carribean Sea, the island of Martinique glows like the versè of Aimé Césaire. Fermenting under the whipping rains, she steams, bristles her fur of sugar cane and ducks under the tornadoes and hurricanes. Unsubdued is nature, mocking the attempt to impose human order and create a secure existence. The earth does not offer a firm soil: the island is like a ship, always in danger of wrecking. Mont Pelée, the highest mountain, is a volcano that erupted without warning in 1902 and buried under a burning cloud the flourishing Port of Saint-Pierre and her forty thousand inhabitants. Until today this volcano has not come to rest. At the feet of this volcano, in Basse-Point, Aimée Césaire was born in 1913. Just as this fiery mountain has mysterious underwater connections with Soufrière on Saint-Vincent and other Carribean volcanoes, so Césaire is connected beyond the Atlantic with Africa, Africa, the country of his ancestors who, in return for liquor and trifles, were once torn away from their native soil, crammed like sardines in the holds of slave ships and finally whipped to work on the sugar plantations of the Leeward Isles.

Thus the rebellion of nature is coupled in his work with the rebellion against oppression. As a third element there is a spirit of extreme lucidity; that typically French spirit which Césaire absorbed in the Lycée Schoelcher, the only secondary school of Martinique. This famous school had been named after Victor Schoelcher who had called to reason his compatriots and with the fire of his arguments broke down the resistance of prejudices and financial interests and had pushed the tentative French Government into the abolition of slavery. It was in this insatiation that Césaire acquired the power of argument that gave direction to the eruption of his protest and turned his volcano into a gun. These three elements of his nature combine into one harmonious whole: his natural impetuosity, his unbridled protest against any chains and the euclidic clarity that illumines his purpose. The copper-head snake with its triangular head, whose bite kills within hours, is the heraldic symbol of Martinique. It is a symbol also for Césaire: "My hands speared on shrubs of stars, but foam borne, dissolve ... the flamespitting geometry of the Trionocephalos....."

When at the age of eighteen he travelled to Paris in order to complete his studies at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, he had not yet written a line. He was, what he later called "a sleeping mountain", a volcano before the eruption.

He needed the distance from the suppressed world of his home. In Paris he became uprooted, educated, a complete product of assimilation. He became a man who had learned to think on European lines, who had been trained as a lecturer in literature, and who could say of himself: "Look, I can make courtesies like you, can show my reverence like you, look, I am not different from you, do not bother about my black skin: the sun has burnt me." To rediscover himself, Césaire needed to acquire a perspective of both: his native isle and Paris. He gained this through Petar Guberina, a Yugoslav fellow student who invited him to his house on the Dalmatian coast. Guberina is now a University Professor in Zagreb and one of the greatest authorities on the works of Césaire and of negro poetry at large. In those days he gave Césaire the leisure which the volcano had needed to erupt. On the sunny coast of the Mediterranean sea Césaire wrote his seventy page long poem "*Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natale*." From the distance the native island seemed to him a country of misery, which reflected the results of four hundred years of colonial rule. Unhappy people, drowned in despair and vice, who have not even enough strength left to resist. Césaire speaks of the "disease ridden stench of corruption, the monstrous sodomy between holy wafer and sacrificial slave, the unsurmountable barriers of prejudice and stupidity, of fornication, hypocrisy, lusts, treachery, lies, falsehoods and blackmail—the panting of frustrated baseness, the effortless enthusiasm, the desires, hysterias and perversions, the buffooneries of misery, the cripples, the tickle, the nettle rash, the lukewarm hammocks of degeneration", in short a hell of dual estrangement, into which one has to descend to purify oneself.

In view of this hell, the European world of reason and of power equally assumes the face of hell. Because the world, in which the civilized, assimilated "good" negro humiliates himself, by "capitulating before himself",—this world has caused that same misery and so reason becomes madness, ideal becomes pretext and every new invention a tool of suppression. The world of suppressed and oppressors is, after all, a unity interlocked in a thousand causes and effects. But to this double world of death, Césaire opposes a world of life: Africa. Not the Africa of a tenable reality but an Africa that Césaire, who has never been to Africa, recreates from the negation of that same hell; a heavenly Africa, in which all European values have been overturned, an Africa of "future gardens" which he must first win for himself, an Africa where those human beings are celebrated" who have not invented gunpowder and not the compass, those who conquered neither steam nor electricity, those who did not explore the oceans and not the sky, but who give themselves up overawed to the essence of things, ignorant of the shell, but seized by the rhythm of things, not intent on conquest, but playing the play of the world.....".

With these verses Césaire has hit on fundamental African conceptions which had become clear to him in long conversations with Senghor, his co-student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. From the abstraction of ancient African conceptions Césaire derives the power which is needed for the salvation of the occidental and colonial world of death. It is pure life force that frees from hell and that in the African conception recalls the dead into life.

In Césaire's conception there is no death in the European sense: everything is life, death is a new spring, no butcher but a transformer. For Césaire Africa is: "There, where death lies on the hand, beautiful like a humming bird."

The dead man returns to the earth:

"There earth contains the map of the wanderings and ruses of death."

Death is sly and invents new forms of life. Drowned people are dissolved into: "flesh of torn guavas, a hand of purification, beautiful seaweeds, flying corn, lightbubble, memory, predicting trees,"

Césaire sings of

"the dead, who circulate in the veins of the earth,
and who sometimes come and knock their heads
against the walls of our ears."

Because in the earth itself the cunning transformations of death take place:

"The seaweeds shall listen

how in zones of green, forgetfulness is entangled and disentangled,

and the roots of the mountains

shall blossom through the paths of flesh,

(the suffering of life is passing like a storm)

while on a signal of the sky,

a golden fire will glow up

in the hot song of my body's fire."

Here is the absolute certainty, the pagan belief in the transforming power of the soil. Césaire has visions of the things inside this earth:

"There are the primordial waters, that sing of the earth's growing
infancy in curves of magnetic circulation.

There lies the ballroom at the feet of our castles in the air,

where dwarfs prepare the mirrors,

where metals with inclined faces pretend to sleep."

These underworld visions of Césaire express confidence in the cunning of death.

European poets who had visions of Hades found there only shadows, not a realm of life or of magical transformation.

For Césaire the world of shadows is the source of life. Césaire is (like Rilke's Orpheus) "the one ordained to praise". He pronounces "the convincing jubilation of the conch shell of a new message" that will revitalise the world that "has died of machines and cannons." (Senghor.) Thus the "Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natale" becomes the catechism of a liberation. A liberation that not only will restore the lost confidence of the suppressed black peoples

but which plans a postrevolutionary future of absolute love and justice for all men.

The poem appeared in 1939 in the journal "Volontés" and was not at first noticed. Césaire returned to Martinique and started work as a lecturer in literature at the Lycée Schoelcher. Two years later, when Hitler's tanks invaded France, André Breton, the 'pope' of the surrealist movement travelled to the West Indies and visited Césaire in Martinique. He "discovered" the great black poet whom he mistook to be a surrealist. Césaire's revaluations and reinterpretations of French words in the light of his African philosophy seemed to resemble (outwardly) Breton's own poetic techniques, and so Breton received him into the group of his disciples with much ado and began to proclaim his new discovery. In 1947 Breton published a new edition of Césaire's great poem which suddenly made him a sensation in literary circles in Paris. By this time, however, Césaire had already become the initiator of a new literary movement and the spokesman of those who demanded colonial self-government. The "Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natale" had produced a wide echo among young talented Africans and West Indians, and had caused a general reorientation towards Africa and produced a flood of equally revolutionary, glowing poetry. In 1948 Senghor was able to combine sixteen black authors in an anthology to which no less a writer than Jean Paul Sartre produced the preface. In this preface, 'Orphée Noire' we find the enthusiastic sentence: "The black poetry in the French language, is in our days, the only great revolutionary poetry."

The poets originated from numerous, widely dispersed territories. They came from French Guiana (Léon Damas) from Guadeloupe (Guy Tirolien, Paul Niger,) from Haiti (Jacques Roumain, Jean F. Briere, Renée Depestre) from Senegal (Birago Diop, David Diop) and Madagascar (Jacques Rabemanjara, Flavien Ranaivo). What they had all in common was the same protest against colonial rule and they all met in Paris where they came under the spell of Césaire and Senghor. They became conscious of their African heritage which they tried to reevaluate and they developed a new race conscious, culture conscious, attitude which they called by Césaire's term "Négritude". But the language offered resistance to these new emotions. It did not fit—it was foreign and incongruous. Leon Laleau has expressed this in the following poem:

This tiresome heart, that never fits
my language or my dress,
forced into the straitjacket
of borrowed sentiments and customs,
trifles of Europe. Oh, in my lame despair
I am condemned to tame
my heart that came from Senegal
with foreign words from France.

Many European symbols and associations do not fit, provoke protest, are being recast. The "heart from Senegal" must sound in new rhythms, create new

images, radiate in new associations. Deliberately, European expressions are being inversed: "white innocence" becomes "the blackness of innocence", the "abyss of innocence" (Césaire) or the "milk of ebony" (Attuly). Thus quite unwittingly surrealist forms are being created, and surrealism — to many of us known as the uncomfortable game of an isolated intellect — develops here into a revolutionary expression:

Already in 1943 Césaire had written his tragedy "And the Dogs were silent." In this tragedy he develops more precisely his thesis of "Cahier d'un Retour" and he demonstrates the sociological and psychological aspects of the colonial problem on a specific case. The play shows us a rebel in prison. He had revolted against his white master and had set fire to the planter's mansion. Now he is to be persuaded with threats and promises to give up his resistance. But he prefers death. The experience of the hell of tutelage and visions of ancient African life teach him that he must sacrifice himself in order to prepare the future, better world, of cosmic unity and community with all living beings, with animal, stone, plant, man and star. With the believing pathos of an African magician he pronounces the new world: "Of the birds, the cockatoos, of bells, silk scarfs and drums, of light ecstasies and wild tendernesses, of child's talk and love talk I shall build a world, my world, my world with round shoulders.....".

Césaire has become the spokesman of an African renaissance, in which the consciousness of freedom and missionary zeal are combined. His poems and articles and political activities belong inseparably together. The first elections after the war in 1945 made him mayor of Fort-de France the capital of Martinique. In the same year he was elected delegate of his country into the French National Assembly in to which he has been re-elected ever since. Since October 1956 he has been representing his country as an independent politician. In a sensational letter to the communist leader Thorez he explained the reasons for leaving the communist party to which he had belonged. He criticised the autocratic attitude of the party and stated: "And we must impose a really Copenican revolution; for so deeply rooted is it in Europe, and in all the parties..... from the extreme right to the extreme left the habit of doing for us, the habit of disposing on our behalf, the habit of thinking for us, in short the habit of challenging the right of initiative which is by definition the right of the personality."

In 1957 he travelled to his home Martinique and opposed all parties in the elections. Out of 37 seats he gained 34. Thus nearly the entire island confirmed him as an independent politician. He and his colleague Senghor are fighting for the same aim, the aim that is enscribed on their letter heads: "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité." To them this is not a mere conventional phrase; for as Césaire wrote in "Cahier d'un Retour": "It is not true that the work of man is already done, that man has finished, that we having nothing to do on this world, that we are the parasites of this world, that we merely need to adapt ourselves to this world. The work of man has only just started.....".

FOUR POEMS

BY AIME CESAIRE

SINCE AKKAD, SINCE ELAM, SINCE SUMER

Master of the three roads a man stands before you who walked much.

Master of the three roads a man stands before you who walked
on hands who walked on feet who walked on the belly who walked
on the behind.

Since Elam. Since Akkad. Since Sumer.

Master of the three roads a man stands before you who has carried much.

And truly, friends, I carried since Elam, since Akkad, since Sumer.

I carried the body of the commander. I carried the railway of the
commander. I carried the locomotive of the commander, the cotton
of the commander. I carried on my woolly head which is such a
suitable pillow, God, the machines, the road, the commander's God.

Master of the three roads I have carried under the sun, I have carried in the
fog wild ants over burning embers, I carried the umbrella, I carried
explosives, I carried the iron collar.

And as one sees in the soft mud on the Nile's border the spur of the ibis,
I have left on the banks, on the mountains, on the shores the grigri of
my squeaking feet.

Since Akkad. Since Elam. Since Sumer.

Master of the three roads. Master of the three trenches, may it please you just
once—for the first time since Akkad since Elam since Sumer—apparently
the snout is more sunburnt than the callous of my feet, but really gentler
than the beak of the crow and as supernaturally draped with biting folds
which my greyloaned skin gives me (the colour which men impose on
me each winter)—that I may walk just once through dead leaves with
small sorcerer steps.

There, where the inexhaustible order of men triumphantly menaces which one
hurled at the knotted sneering of the hurricane.

Since Elam since Akkad since Sumer.

translated by Miriam Koshland.

WORD

with me
from myself to myself
outside any constellation
I hold in my hands only
the rare sobbing of a last delirious spasm
vibrate word

I shall have chance outside the labyrinth
vibrate longer wider
in closer and closer waves
as a lasso that catches me
as a sling that hangs me
and all arrows and their most bitter poison nail me
unto a fine post—amidst fresh stars
vibrate vibrate essence of the shade
in the wing in the throat in order to finally perish
the word negro rose armoured from the howling of a poisonous plant
the word negro is soiled by parasites
the word negro is full of highwaymen who prowls around mothers
who are crying for their children
the word negro crackles of bitterly burnt flesh and horn
the word negro is like the sun from whose claw the blood drips
onto the sidewalk of the clouds
the word negro is like the last laugh born of innocence between
the fangs of the tiger
and as the word sun is a clinking of balls
and as the word night is a cloth being torn
the word negro clusters like thunder in summer
presumptuous like incredible liberties

AFRICA

Your solar crown they've knocked around your neck
with a crosier,
wrought of it a collar, the sockets
of your vision have they crushed, whored thy chaste regard
and muzzled your voice, which spoke in the silence of the shadows,
shrieking it was guttural.

Africa

hands against hands, laughter against laughter,
thy arms disarmed, naked and torn by the bushes,
exposed to their unhappy, dissolute laughter.
Tremble not, the battle is new,
the live flow of your blood creates the spring
without fail, the night is today in the depth of the pools
a huge restless back of a star in ill repose.
Hunt and battle! Even if to conjure the space,
you have but the space of your name, shrivelled with drought!
Africa, these broken bones, these outraged faces
these prisons, this spittle
link to the cavern of the future
a god of a spring's deep source,
the lightening leads to drink a tall herd of lips
and the spring even eager that the summer lie to the rock.
Africa, between the temples of thy drums
between the ramparts of thy laughter
in thy own last depth
exalts the eagle of a memory
smoking.

The spirit of prey with its eyes of mercury
crushes in its enormous stink the spring
but the word is hard, the will sure and the hour cedes
the forgotten days which walk always among the twisting
shells among the doubts of the regard
shall burst upon the public face among the happy ruins!
In the plain
the white tree with helping arms outstretched will be like every tree
a tempest of trees in surging foam and sands
the hidden things shall climb again the slope
of slumbering music
a wound of today is a womb of the orient
a shuddering which rises from the black forgotten fires, it is
the ruin risen from the ash, bitter word of scars
all lithe and new, a visage
of old, bird of scorn, bird reborn, brother of the sun.

translated by Paul Vesey.

FROM: "NOTES ON A RETURN TO THE NATIVE COUNTRY."

Those who have not invented gunpowder and not the compass
those who did not conquer steam and not electricity
those who did not explore the oceans and not the skies
but without whom the earth would not be the earth:
a hill much more fertile than the devastated earth,
more than the earth,
a barn that gathers and ripens what the earth gives us from earth
My negroism is no deaf stone that reflects the noise of the day
my negroism is no spot on the dead eye of the earth
my negroism is no tower and no dome
It dives into the red flesh of the soil
It dives into the flowing flesh of the sky
transfixing the sad burden of my erect patience.
Hurray for those who never invented anything
hurray for those who never explored anything
hurray for those who never conquered anything
but who, in awe, give themselves up to the essence of things,
ignorant of the shell, but seized by the rhythm of things,
not intent on conquest, but playing the play of the world:
true and truly the firstborn of this world
receptive to every breath of the world
brotherly enclosure for all the winds of the world
bed and not gutter for all the waters of the world
sparks of the holy fire of the world
flesh of the flesh of the world, trembling in the world's tremble.
Listen to the white world
how it resents its great efforts
how their protest is broken under the rigid stars
how their steelblue speed is paralyzed in the mystery of the flesh.
listen how their defeats sound from their victories
listen to the lamentable stumbling in the great alibis.
Mercy! mercy for our omniscient, naive conquerors.
Hurray for those who never invented anything
hurray for those who never explored anything
hurray for those who never conquered anything
hurray for joy
hurray for love
hurray for the pain of incarnate tears!

And now at the end of the morning my masculine prayer,
that I may not hear the laughter and the cries,
my eyes fixed to the town that I prophesy:
Give me the wild belief of the magician
give my hands the power to create
give my soul the hardness of the sword,
I am not shirking. Make my head to the head of the keel
and myself, my heart, do not turn me into any father, brother, son
but the father, the brother, the son,
not any husband but the lover of this unique people.
Turn me into a fighter against all conceit
and yet obedient to my people's spirit
just like the fist on the extended arm!
Turn me into the attorney of its blood
turn me into the retreat of its wrath
turn me into the man of aim and destiny
turn me into the man of the beginning, of the blessing,
turn me into the man of harvest and collection
but turn me too into the man of sprouting seeds!
But preserve me, heart, from all hatred
do not turn me into a man of hate whom I shall hate
for in order to emerge into this unique race
you know my worldwide love,
know it is not hatred against other races
that turns me into the cultivator of this one race
for what I want
arises from infinite hunger
from infinite thirst
finally to demand them to be free,
freely in their secluded soul
to create the ripening fruit.

THE NOVEL IN THE FRENCH CAMEROONS

BY ULLI BEIER

West Africa has produced a great deal of interesting poetry but very few novels. A large country like Nigeria, for example, has had only one novel published in the English language: Ekwensi's "People of the City." (We do not count Tutuola here, because while being a great writer, he cannot be classified as a novelist in the usual sense of the word.)

It is the more surprising therefore, that the French Cameroons has produced four novels recently, all of a very high standard. They are "Une Vie de Boy" (the Life of a Boy) by Ferdinand Oyono, "Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille". (The Old Negro and the Medal) by the same author; "Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba" (The Poor Christ of Bomba) by Mongo Beti, and "Ville Cruelle", (Cruel City) by Eza Boto.

Ferdinand Oyono is the most accomplished author among the three. He is a brilliant writer, with biting humour and a merciless gift of observation. The weaknesses of white and black people are seen and described with the same pitiless frankness. Oyono has a profound knowledge of human nature and he refuses to idealize even the heroes of his novels. This realism is conscious and purposeful. In a review in "Présence Africaine", Ferdinand Oyono is quoted as having said: ".....the Cameroons have been a country hidden behind a curtain of illusions. It is the business of the Cameroonian writer to lift this curtain.....".

In his two novels the author treats the problem of the relationship between whites and blacks in a colonial society. It is his thesis that no form of genuine friendship can exist in the colonial situation, and that most of the Africans who have dealings with white people build up a false picture of them in their minds until, through bitter experience, they learn what their masters are really like. "THE LIFE OF A BOY" describes one such process of disillusionment. Toundi, a young boy, has taken refuge in the house of the Reverend Father Gilbert when, at an early age, he tried to escape a beating at home. The circumstances under which he found his way to the white man's house, his extreme youth, and the relative kindness of the father all help to build up an idealized picture of the white man in the young boy's mind. But Father Gilbert

dies, and Toundi is suddenly brought up against reality when he takes a job as the boy of the District Officer. He is at first very proud of having received the job: "the dog of the king is the king of dogs," he tells himself.

The District Officer treats him roughly but shows a certain liking for the boy. Somewhat naively Toundi observes the life of the white people on the station. Their drinking bouts, their foolish conversations, their artificial manners. The author knows what he is talking about, he has obviously first hand knowledge, and his pictures of the French colonials are superb.

"Madame Salvain wore a red silk dress, which brought into proper relief her large heart-shaped behind. She had knotted her hair in the shape of an eight, and had pinned on a hibiscus flower, as bright red as her dress. She came forward smiling, her arms extended towards the district officer. He seized her by the wrists and applied his lips to them in turn. She started as if one had placed live coals on her arms. She spoke so fast that I asked myself whether this was really French I heard."

The characters of the book are almost exclusively European. There is the chief of police nicknamed "bird's throat" by the Africans, there is Father Vandermayer the "director of consciences", and the coarse director of prisons nicknamed "the white elephant". There is the schoolmaster, utterly disliked by the other Frenchmen, because he treats Africans like human beings, and there is the agricultural officer who hides his black mistress whenever he receives white visitors.

Toundi's admiration for the white people reaches a climax, when the District Officer's wife arrives from France. She is young, beautiful, gay and apparently kind. She sends him into raptures, because she innocently shakes hands with him when she arrives, she has not yet acquired colonial manners.

"My happiness knows no day. my happiness knows no night. I was not aware of it, it has revealed itself to me. I shall sing my happiness on my flute, I shall sing it on the shore of the lake, but no words can translate it. I have shaken the hand of my queen. I felt myself really alive."

He thinks she is the most beautiful woman alive. "Her smile is refreshing like a well; her look is mild like a ray from the parting sun." All other women seem eclipsed by her: "Madame Salvain is like an oil lamp that has been dragged into the sun."

However, his illusions are quickly destroyed, when the District Officer goes on tour and "Madame" starts an affaire with the rather coarse director of prisons. Suddenly the adored white masters appear to him in an entirely new light. He sees their sordid morals, is shocked when he learns about their habits of using protectives, and is pained to see that the life of his idol has become a web of lies. He watches her trying to cover her feelings when the yet ignorant District Officer has invited the Director of Prisons to dinner.

"It is strange, the thousand expressions that can follow each other on the face of woman in such moments. Madame's little smiles changed all the

time, according to whether they were directed to her lover or her husband. When she smiled at the first, I saw no more than her eyelashes. When she smiled at the District Officer, the little drops of sweat which appeared on her brow indicated the effort she was making to smile as naturally as possible."

Of course, the guilt feelings of Madame were transposed into irritation against the boy. Gradually she accumulates hatred towards him, knowing of course, that he knows everything and overcoming her feelings of shame with rudeness. As long as the District Officer remains ignorant of the goings on, however, the boy's position is secure in the house. His mistress could not dare to sack him under these circumstances. But in the end the truth comes out. After a few days of furious dispute the District Officer is reconciled to his wife, however, and now Toundi's position becomes most precarious. Because now the husband and the wife both relieve their feelings by accumulating hatred towards the boy—the witness of their humiliations. A fellow servant warns Toundi to leave the house, while it is time.

"If I were in your place, she said, I would leave now, while the river has not yet swallowed you entirely. Our forefathers used to say, that one must save oneself while the water only reaches to the knee. As long as you are here, the District Officer cannot forget. It is foolish but white people are like that.... For him you will be.... I do not know how to call it.... You will be something like the sorcerer's eye, that sees and that knows. A thief, or somebody who has something to reproach himself with, can never remain calm before that eye...."

But Toundi's eyes are opened too late. He has hesitated too long and the catastrophe comes. The commissioner of police suspects him of having been connected with a theft in another white man's house. The District Officer, who by that time must have known him not be a thief might have saved him. But he merely shrugs his shoulders, washing his hands of the whole business, undoubtedly glad to be rid of the boy at last.

In prison Toundi's last illusions are being destroyed...

"THE OLD NEGRO AND THE MEDAL" is a kind of companion volume to "The Life of a Boy." In this book the same subject is treated: the disillusionment of an African about his white "friends". But this case is even more drastic than the first, and in a sense even more tragic. Because Meka, the hero of the book, is an old man, and all his long life he has lived under the illusion of the friendship that existed between him and the white people, until the moment that was to be the climax of his life, tears away the curtain in front of his eyes and he must recognise that he sacrificed his life to an illusion. Meka is "a good negro", that is one who has believed innocently all the protestations of friendship of his white masters and has remained loyal all his life. He has given his land to the Catholic Mission.

"He was blessed with being the owner of a piece of land, that one fine morning, found favour in the eyes of the Lord. It was a white father who revealed to him his divine destiny. How could one go against the will of

Him-who-gives? Meka, who in the meantime had been reborn by baptism, effaced himself before the usher of the Almighty. He followed, enthusiastically, the erection of the House of God on the land of his ancestors."

But not only had he given away his lands to the Mission: he had also given away two of his sons, who died in the war for the glory of France.

When the old man is being called by the district officer and told that he is going to receive a medal for his services to France, his joy knows no bounds. Yes, he is indeed the friend of the white man. All his loyalty and his sacrifices have not been forgotten. The news spreads like a bushfire and from far and wide Meka's friends and relatives arrive in order to be present at the great ceremony. All of them feel that they share a little in the great honour.

"The friend of the chief is he not himself a little bit of a chief? What strange destiny would be Meka's? From the simple farmer he had been he was to become somebody among the whites. He would be the only native able to walk past the District Officer's office with his topee on the head." Meka's house is filled with visitors and they grow more and more excited with every minute of expectation. Meka makes great preparations for the ceremony. He needs a new coat and in an incredibly funny scene, we witness the tailor cutting an ultra modern zoot suit for poor old Meka. Ela the tailor is one of Oyono's funniest characters.

"He chatted, whistled, panted, drank and eat over his machine. The husks of the groundnuts he was nibbling fell on the cloth.

— You know that I shall not wash this coat before wearing it, said Meka.

— Ela laughed. — Groundnuts do not stain, Ah, if everything one ate were like that"

Meka's wife Kelara also persuades him that he must appear before the big chief of the white people in a pair of new shoes. Meka knows that he will go through torture, because his old feet are not used to wearing shoes, but decides to face the ordeal. He spends the last night before the ceremony in great excitement.

"He smiled again and tried to picture to himself the chief of the white people. What kind of head might he have, and what would he say to him? Since he was going to be his friend, was he going to throw himself into the arms of the white man?"

But when the great day comes Meka's faith is gradually being shaken. The great chief of the whites is one hour late, and all that time the poor old man is being left standing in the sun, awaiting the ceremony! While he is waiting, enduring the pain of his shoes and the heat of the sun and wondering about the lack of consideration on the part of his "friends", he suddenly realises his strange situation.

"Neither his father, nor his grandfather, nor any other member of his family had ever found themselves placed like himself on a large whitewashed square, between two worlds; his own and the world of those who had first

been called "the fantoms" when they arrived in the country. He found himself neither with his own people, nor with the others. He asked himself what he was doing there. He might just as well have waited with Kelara, who was surely among the crowd that was screaming behind him, and they might have called him to give him the medal when the chief of the white people came."

It requires quite an effort on his part to keep the complex body of his illusions intact. But who would readily give up an illusion on which he has built his entire life? His wife Kelara, acting more instinctively, collapses first. When at last she sees her husband decorated, and grinning at the strange white people, she breaks out into hysterical tears: he has sold my two sons for a medal, she cries. In a sudden vision she has grasped the meaning of the situation. Meka in the meantime drinks himself into a happy state, and before the assembled population of Doum he invites the great white chief to come and share the goat with him, which his brother-in-law has presented to him. The white man's evasive reply slowly begins to open the eyes of Meka and the audience. All these protestations of friendship and brotherhood of the big white man, what do they mean? Are they any more than phrases?

However the lesson which Meka is beginning to learn is driven home with extra force.

Meka, heavily drunk, remains behind unnoticed in the assembly hall which is being locked. He awakes very late at night from the noise of a terrible thunderstorm. He notices that he has lost his medal and gropes in the dark for the exit. The building nearly collapses over his head. At last he finds his way into the open and runs towards the town. Mistaking his direction in the dark, he moves towards the government reservation and is challenged by a policeman.

Meka who, a few hours ago was the celebrated "good negro", decorated by the big chief of the whites, is suddenly the "native" who has transgressed on the white master's domain. The policeman, suspecting him to be a thief, maltreats him and locks him into a cell.

Thus the old man finds himself suddenly up against the wicked machinery of colonialism. Of course, he is recognised the next morning and released, but his illusions about being the friend of the white man have collapsed. He returns to his house, feeling that he is a very old man.

Meka, who is a little ridiculous at the beginning of the novel, with his naive credulity and his weird sense of dignity, achieves towards the end the stature of a tragic hero. He is Ferdinand Oyono's greatest creation. With a sure hand the author delineates the strange goings on in the old man's mind, till the last bitter moment of enlightenment. Meka is a broken man at the end of the novel, but in his utter and complete resignation he achieves for the first time in his life a real dignity.

Mongo Beti's "THE POOR CHRIST OF BOMBA" bears certain superficial resemblances to "The Life of a Boy." This novel too takes the form of a diary written by a young African in the service of a European. There is the same

pseudo-naive tone and the same sarcastic humour. There is the same violent attack on colonialism and on Europeans in Africa. "The Poor Christ of Bomba" lacks the compactness of Oyono's book. It is a little repetitive at times and does not move as fast as "The Life of a Boy." But there is undoubtedly brilliant writing here, an acute sense of humour, a sound knowledge of character and a ruthless frankness that cannot fail to impress.

The subject of the book is the Christianisation of Africa and the dubious situation into which the white missionary is placed in a colonial society. The hero of the book is the Reverend Father Drumont, who is represented as a hardworking, sincere missionary. He is a fanatic for his faith and extremely intolerant: he forbids his converts to visit pagan relatives and interrupts pagan dancing on a Christian holiday. In spite of twenty years in the country he understands little about African life and mentality and continually blunders, breaking up innumerable families in the name of Christ. His manners are rough, but the Africans are aware nevertheless of the great love he has for them and they like him and respect him. His outstanding characteristic is his integrity. When he comes up against failure in his work, he tries to understand the real factors that have caused the situation and he is prepared to draw the consequences.

The book describes Father Drumont's tour through the country of the Tala. The people are far from the main roads, in real back country and Christianity has made poor progress in that region. To punish the people for their negligence in religious matters the Father has 'abandoned' them for three years. Now he revisits the district for the first time after so long. He finds his communities in a sad state. The churches are in a dilapidated state, the members fail to pay their church duties, some revert to traditional forms of religion: the catechists are in despair. Wherever he goes he thunders against polygamy and tries to make people drive away all wives except one. But the Christians are apathetic and the non-Christians openly hostile, they treat him as an invader, a disturber of the peace. Once or twice he nearly provokes them to violence. Father Drumont, though, gets away with it even in the most awkward situations, partly because of his personal courage, but mostly because the people know that the force of the French Colonial Government is behind him.

Father Drumont is bitterly disappointed. How is it, he asks himself, that the people here are less open to Christianity than they were even twenty years ago? What has happened to cause this change?

His African cook Zarachie suggests an answer:

"The first among us who came flocking to religion, to your religion, they came there, as if to ... a revelation, that's it, a revelation, a school where they might acquire the revelation of your secret, the secret of your power, the power of your aeroplanes, your railways and what not..... the secret of your mystery in fact. Instead of that you started to talk to them about God, the soul, eternal life, and so on. Do you think that they did not know about all that before, well before your arrival?"

Father Drumont, though, is a fighter and he does not easily give up. He continues his tour from village to village facing the same disappointments over and over again. He is shaken to the core when one of the illiterate chiefs tells him contemptuously: "Jesus Christ too was a white man." Will the difference of race for ever stand between him and these people? His work of course is made more difficult, because the villagers know how the white people in the Colonies live and they turn round to the father and say: Why don't you bring your doctrine to them? Why don't you preach your morals to your own people?

Father Drumont is worried particularly about one aspect of his work. Why is it that he seems to make converts so easily along the main roads and with such difficulty in the bush? Is it that life in the towns has become so hard, that people are so much oppressed by the colonial government, in perpetual fear of increased taxes and forced labour, that they merely run to the church for protection and solace? Does it mean, that the Christian faith means little even to his converts, and they merely join the church for other reasons?

But the Administrator, Monsieur Vidal, laughs and says to the Reverend Father: Rejoice, you shall have your converts. At this moment the Government is planning to build a main road through the country of the Tala. In a few months forced labour will be recruited from the villages. The people will be made to sweat. They will suffer. Then they will start running to you for protection. Your churches will soon be full. Don't worry.

Father Drumont is shocked by so much cynicism. But the administrator smiles and says: "After all we are both in the same boat."

Gradually it begins to dawn on the father, that as long as colonial Governments exist the missionary is the accomplice of colonialism. He cannot face this situation once he has realized it. He does not wish to owe his success to the sufferings inflicted by the government. So after twenty years he decides to leave. With deep resignation he wonders whether anybody should ever try to impose his religion on other people. Do the Chinese make frantic efforts to convert the Parisians to belief in Confucius?

The people are shocked and bewildered when they hear he is going to leave. The women cry. The father himself is broken hearted but resolved. Even the administrator tries to persuade him to stay. But Father Drumont answers in a parable. The notorious Saba people, he says, are reputed to travel always in twos. One arrives at a place about a day before the other and he strews bad medicine all about. Everybody falls sick, but soon the second arrives and as he carries the antidotes in his bag he cures everybody and thus becomes rich. 'I do not wish to repeat the comedy of the Saba,' concludes the Father.

This is a bold book and an aggressive one. But it speaks out what must be on many men's minds in the Cameroons. It is significant, that the other two novelists from that territory, Ferdinand Oyono and Eza Boto, are not much more sympathetic to the missions. Mongo Beti's book is, of course, open to criticism and many African readers may disagree with him. They will not be able to deny, however, that he has put his case with great intelligence and wit.

Moreover he brings to life a number of unforgettable characters. Not only the tormented Father Drumont, and the cynical M. Vidal, but also the naive young boy who is telling the story, the lusty cook Zacharie, the beautiful Catherine and a host of others. The love scenes, particularly the seduction of the young boy, are handled with delicacy and humour. In spite of occasional 'longeurs' this is one of the most brilliant books to have come out of West Africa. "The Poor Christ of Bomba" is thoroughly good literature; and that is what we are basically concerned with in this journal.

The last work to be discussed in this article is "CRUEL TOWN" by Eza Boto.

"Eza Boto is a very young author. He has not written anything except a short story: "Sans haine et sans amour" which Présence Africaine published in a special issue "The Negro Student Speaks."

A native of French West Africa, he is twenty two years old and is studying in a faculty of letters."

Thus the publishers introduce this novel on the front page of the book. Their introduction sounds a little apologetic. And as a matter of fact, the novel does have its weaknesses and improbabilities.

The plot is easily summed up. Banda, a young boy, breaks the news to his girl friend that must sever the relationship; he must marry another to obey the wishes of his mother. While he asserts that he does not care very much for the 'little girl' one also feels that he is not too reluctant to jilt the girl friend. In any case he is religiously devoted to his mother and must respect her wishes. She is ill and will die soon and he wishes to give her this last joy of seeing him married before she dies.

Accordingly he sets out the next morning to Tanga the nearest big town to sell his cocoa. With the proceeds of his sale he will be able to pay for the girl's dowry which is high. However, the government produce examiners are corrupt, and as the young and inexperienced boy has not produced a bribe they condemn his perfectly good cocoa and have it burnt. All Banda's plans are suddenly shattered, his hopes of marriage destroyed. He does not know how to break the news to his mother and so lingers a while in the town and finds his way to a drinking place and consoles himself with maize beer.

Here he meets Odilia, the heroine, a young girl from the bush, as naive as Banda and as much in trouble. Her brother, a mechanic, had served a wicked white master who would not pay his workers. Odilia's brother Koumé organised a little revolt in which they take their money by force. But in the ensuing fight the white man is severely wounded and dies. Koumé must go into hiding in the nearby bush, Odilia fears for his life. Banda's fraternal feelings are aroused and he magnanimously offers help. He knows every bush path and will safely conduct Koumé through the police posts and hide him in his own village. During their escape, however, Koumé slips down the escarpment near the river and falls to death. Odilia is now left all alone and Banda takes her to his mother. Suddenly, however, he has a brainwave and he returns to find Koumé's corpse and searches his pockets. And indeed the money taken from the white man's

safe is still there, fifteen thousand francs. This of course solves his marriage problem. It is rather more than he had hoped to realise from his cocoa. But a little problem of conscience poses itself: should he not give the money to Odilia? Is it not hers? He hesitates. He thinks of a compromise. He will try to make do with ten thousand francs and let Odilia have five, pretending that that was all he found in Koumé's pocket. In the end the difficulty is beautifully solved, when his mother suggests that he should marry Odilia. Suddenly he realizes that his fraternal feelings for the girl are really love. His bliss is made complete by the fact that Odilia comes from a tribe that has abolished the custom of paying a bride price. Banda's luck and happiness are increased (and the plot is further ruined) when he finds a box of jewels belonging to a Greek and is given ten thousand francs reward. He can now securely marry his Odilia and the mother can lie down happily to die, in order to give Banda a chance to leave his native village and go and settle in Fort-Nègre, the big city.

The ending of the novel is, of course, too improbable for words, and the solution to Banda's conflict of conscience is rather too cheap. In fact, all Banda's troubles are solved merely by the most incredible series of lucky circumstances. He himself is neither wiser nor more experienced than on the day when he lost his cocoa and felt he was a miserable good-for-nothing.

As they are, however, these weaknesses are merely weaknesses of the plot. The novel has great merits and makes good reading, because Eza Boto is a good story teller. His intriguing description of Tanga, the cruel town, to which the villagers are drawn by a sense of adventure and where they live insecure, unhappy lives is a little gem. This chapter has already been translated into English by Christopher Hancock and published in *Présence Africaine*. The author creates an exciting picture of this town, of its lively commercial activities, its noise, its roughness, its dancing places and drinking bars. Above all he brings the people to life:

"They had come from all over the land. But they tended increasingly to regard themselves as inhabitants of Tanga rather than as natives of the south, north, east and west. You could see them in the street: laughing, arguing, quarrelling, with gestures large enough to embrace the entire universe. They ran, walked, jostled one another, fell off their bicycles, and all with a certain spontaneity, the single vestige of their lost purity.

In contrast to these towns' people are the villagers, who come into Tanga from time to time to sell their wares. To them belongs the authors real love, particularly to the women, to whom he is devoted like Banda, his hero:

"He had a weakness for the women of the bush, whom one recognized easily, by certain characteristic signs. They wore clothes of sombre colours and simple cut. They had muscular limbs. They covered their hair with a silk hand-kerchief..... Their ease of manner also distinguished them. In happy and lively groups they looked over the stalls of the merchants, touching everything, returning the objects undecidedly demanding the price, discussing it and not buying anything in the end. One could see them, squatting in front of a heap of bananas, yams or oranges, calling a potential customer, bargaining with

feigned quarrelsomeness, the mouth bitter and aggressive, but laughter in their eyes."

The author shows this same touching devotion whenever he speaks about women, whether it is the hero's mother, his girl friend, Odilia the heroine, or the simple women of his mother's village whose virtues and whose kindness he contrasts favourably with the hardness of the people in Tanga.

The beginning of Banda's love affair with Odilia is charmingly naive, the more so because Banda has already been described as having had "little friends" and his friendships were not altogether Platonic. But Odilia, the pure girl from the bush, makes him feel gentle and pure himself and he identifies his growing love as merely fraternal feelings:

"What is your name?"

"Banda. And yours?"

"Odilia."

"How fantastic! My little sister carried that name. She was beautiful..... like you....."

"Is she dead?"

"Yes, quite young; she was only a little thing. And she died just like that; she had hardly been ill."

"Did you love her much?"

"Oh yes, you cannot imagine how I have missed her since."

"Later he confessed to himself that he had not really wanted to lie, that he did not really know why had told her this story, which was entirely made up. He only knew one thing: he had always wanted a junior sister, and sometimes it seemed to him that he had had one who died very young. He could not tell from where he had got this impression, but he had often experienced it. That was actually true. Strangely enough, he had always given the name Odilia to his imaginary sister. That also was actually true."

This delightful little scene brings out the immaturity of the hero. His boyish romanticism is extremely well described by the author and in the last analysis this book is perhaps more about Banda than about anything else.

Banda is in many ways a typical young man. He has grown up in a little village in the bush. And although he is devoted to his mother and he greatly admires and loves the simple people who surround her, his one and only wish is to go and live in the city. He has realized that life in the city is not untold bliss and he knew that he would not find the kindness of the inhabitants of Bamila. But "as far as he was concerned he preferred the absolute indifference of the inhabitants of Tanga North, who were too preoccupied with their own business—just like white people—to the pity, the commiseration and worried compassion of the inhabitants of Bamila."

In Bamila he was worried too much by the old people, who, well-meaning though they might be, impeded his freedom. He could no longer agree with many of their ideas and yet he was meant to listen to them and obey them all the time. Banda is stubborn, he wants to live according to his own head, and he can never agree with his old uncle Tonga who is full of advice and reproaches:

"It seemed to him that he and Tonga were in two different canoes on a huge river that flowed rapidly. They stretched out their hands towards each other. Their hands touched, gripped one another and interlocked. They started to pull each other strongly, each wanting to force the other to step over into his own craft, to join him on board of his own canoe. But they pulled in vain. The rapid current pushed the canoes asunder and each minute widened the gap. Finally, tired of the war, their hands disengaged. And each one drifted to his own side, full of resentment against the other."

But as long as his mother is alive he feels that he must stay, although the lure of the big city is always at the back of his mind. Although he dearly loves his mother, her death comes like a liberation. At last he is free to go and no reproaches of friends and relatives can stop him.

"But Banda," Sabina had protested "this is also the village of your father! And what about the cocoa plantation that he has left you?....."

"And who has said," replied the orphan, "that the son must necessarily live where the father had lived? I shall settle in Fort-Nègre. Perhaps I shall return in five, twenty or thirty years, who knows? Perhaps then everything will have changed: the old men will probably be dead and one shall certainly be able to breathe....."

"And to think" sighed Sabina "that our children are but awaiting our death in order to depart thus....."

"If we do it," protested Banda who was suddenly feeling weak and empty. "if we abandon our villages and our beautiful and maternal forest, it is not always with a glad heart."

The plot of "Cruel Town" may be unconvincing but the young hero and his problems ring essentially true. All told it is a remarkable first novel and we look forward to seeing the next work of Eza Boto.

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OLD MAN MAYPECK

BY ALSTON ANDERSON

"The only thing wrong with Old Man Maypeck," my daddy said to me one time, "is that when he gets to talking there just ain't no stopping him." Another time he said, when I'd asked him something about the old man, "That nigger's crazier than a bow-legged coon dog. Don't you go listening to everything that man says, Aaron. He's crazy."

For a long time I didn't have the chance to prove whether my father was right or wrong, because the old man didn't have much to say to us younger ones. Besides, he didn't like the fact that my father had left my mother. Every time he saw me on the street after that he'd either look the other way or nod his head jerky-like and walk on.

This morning when I was on my way to buy groceries for my father I didn't expect him to say much more than good morning when I passed his house—if that much. The house was right at the edge of town, smack alongside of the dirt road that leads to Kapalachee. It was a nice two-story house that one of his sons built for him. He had two sons in real estate, and I've been told that it was him that had the business before his sons. If you pass by the house early enough in the morning you can see him in the front yard sweeping up with a sage brush. As I was walking by I saw him cleaning up, just as I thought he would be, so I said good morning.

"Up mighty early, ain't you Lil one?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had coffee?"

"No, sir."

"Come on in and have some."

I was surprised that he'd asked me in, and the first thing I thought of was what my father'd told me. I thought of making some kind of excuse, but it was too late. He'd already gone inside.

There wasn't much you could tell about Old Man Maypeck. Some folks said he was seventy-five, others claimed he was closer to ninety, and a lot of people said he was a hundred years old. Some folks said his daddy was a white man, other that it was an Indian, and a lot of people claimed he was lying about the whole thing.

Until I was about twelve years old I thought he had only one suit to his name. I thought, too, that that red scarf he wore Summer, Rain or Winter was the only one he had to his name. But my father told me that the old man had plenty of clothes, all the same kind: black suits, black shoes, black socks, white stiff-collared shirts and red polka-dot scarfs. He had an eggshell coloured Panama hat, too, but he only wore that in the Summer time.

I thought, too, as I was going into the house, that the malacca cane he always carried was the only one he had. But as I went in the front door there was a whole string of them, hanging white and neat on a walking-stick rack. It was nice and cool inside and I couldn't smell anything except the coffee brewing; not like most people's houses I'd been in. There was a big straw mat on the floor and not a chair in sight; only a long, low couch against a white-washed wall and a mahogany table in front of it. There was one picture on the wall above the couch—I meant to say a painting—of an old white man with sea-blue eyes and jet-white hair. It was the onliest thing in the way of decoration in the room.

For an old man he got around right smartly. When he started taking out the coffee cups and things I offered to help him, but he said no. He set a coffee can and cups and saucers on the table, then he went into the kitchen and brought out a big plate of hot biscuits, butter and bacon. (I found out later that he had a woman that fixed his meals for him every day.) Didn't neither of us say a word for a while. When he started talking it was so sudden-like that I jumped. But I listened real good.

"All this land is mine. All of it. What this here whole town is built up on is my land. It's mine because Old Mistress willed it to me when she died. Them high-fashioned stores on Willard Street what me and you can't set a foot in is built up on my land. The Post Office is where the big house used to be, and if you look right close you can still see the foundations of it as you turn the corner of Davis Street. I was borned in that house, and lived in it right along with Old Master and the Mistress. My daddy was white—that's him up there on the wall,—and my mammy was a black woman named Janey. My daddy was named John Maynard Peck and he was first cousin to my master, what was Thomas Peck. The niggers took to calling me 'Maypeck' during construction days, but I signs my name George Maynard Peck. There was a whole scandalization because of me, which I ain't going talk about, but this is my land.

"It don't grieve me none that they taken my land. That was the way they was raised. The poor white trash was raised to believe that they's a heap better than the niggerfolks, and the niggerfolks was told in construction days that they's every bit as good as the next white trash. So what you's got now is a bunch of poor white trash trying their damndest to be as good as or better than a bunch of scared niggers. That there is the scrucial junction of the entire transaction. But don't let them fool you, son. The good white folks is mostly gone. I could count you the good white folks in this here State on the fingers

of one hand without unfolding my thumb. Them big stores and Cadillacs and banks and things they got in the other part of town don't fool me none a-stall. I knowed their daddies and their granddaddies and their great-granddaddies; and they was nothing but poor white trash. The Big War was the cause of that. At the end of it most the good white folks freed their niggers and left. Or they just stayed here and died away one by one. They's gone, son. Gone, gone, gone.

"Them was terrible times during the Big War. The big road ran right by Old Master's place, and you could see the 'federate soldiers going by right smartly on they hosses. Later on you could see them straggling back looking tired and bloody and worn-out something terrible. I didn't hardly get no sleep in them days. When Old Master goes off to fight he says "George?" he says. "I want you to guard this place like it was your own land, your own home." So I stood guard outside the big house most the nights with a flint-lock rifle.

"But it wasn't always like that, son! Oh, ho, it wasn't always like that! Before all the foolishness that led up to the Big War us niggers on Marse Peck's place had ourselves a time! They'd be hog-killings and corn shuckings and syrup-makings—and at each and every one of them we'd have ourselves a time! Old Marse would give us a couple hogsheads of whiskey and we'd do the Cake Walk and the Jig and the Sammy Brown—ha! you don't know nothing 'bout that, do you? Them dances you young folks do nowadays couldn't hold a pine torch 'gainst a good jig. The womenfolk would dress up in their fineries and us young bucks would do our best to outdo one another on the boards. Yessir, them was good days.

"But the Big War changed all that. The 'federate soldiers took to coming by the big house and Old Mistress and Young Mistress and one of the nigger womens—I forget now which one it was—would fix they bandages up best they could and us house niggers would feed them. Then the Yankees taken to coming by and Old Mistress had us feed them, too, even though she was crying the while. The Yankees didn't bother our place like they did some of the others, because Old Mistress was good to them. Lots of times they'd wreck a place real good and run off with the corn and hosses and turn the niggers loose.

"I remember one day in particular. A bunch of Yankee soldiers come by, and they had some niggers in Yankee uniform with them what did they heavy work. They was bivouacked down by a creek—that same creek that Mutton Head was drowned in a few years back—and me and another nigger named Cyrus used to take their victuals to them in big, black cookpots. If I don't disremember they'd done been with us three or four days by this time. Well sir, me and Cyrus was going down the hill towards them this day with this here cookpot slung on a pole between us. When we am about sixty or seventy yards from them a shell lights ka-CHOO-ey right in they midst and niggers and Yankee and hosses and cootermments went every-which-a-way. Cyrus dropped his end of the pole and run like a jackrabbit. I was mighty scared myself, but the transaction happened so fast I didn't know which way to turn. I was a

big buck nigh on to twenty-two years of age at the time, but it looks to me now that that was the first time I thought in my whole life. (Old Master used to say, 'You does the work and I does the thinking.' Hhhhh-ha!) I set down my end of the pole and thought: now what is these white folks killing up one another for? What is it that make a man act like that? I ain't found the answer to that yet, son. I picked up the pole and the cookpot and started back to the big house, because it 'curred to me that my place was by the Mistress. Them Yankees and niggers down yonder had gone to glory.

"The devilment started during construction days. The Klu Klux took to killing up and beating up niggers, and most of us was scared spotless. The Yankees took to acting up, too, putting foolishness in niggers' heads. They'd stop a nigger and say, "What's your name?" The nigger would give only his first name, most the times, because a whole heap of them didn't have no last name. So they'd ask the nigger his master's last name and tell him that was his name, too. Top of that they'd say, "Don't let nobody call you a nigger. You's a Negro." But to this day a nigger to me is still a nigger. Them damn Yankees can go to hell.

"A heap of niggers won't satisfied with their last names. They took to calling themselves big names. I knowed a nigger back then what called hisself Conscrucious Thaddemoseus Frobinnigus Jones. Big, black buck of a nigger he was, nearbout taller than I am and I'm a good six foot two. He was a 'Negro'. Call him a nigger and he'd be after your butt with a pick-axe. He allowed as how he knowed everything, because he'd done set in court and listen to the Yankee lawyers argue. He got hisself elected to office, and a more uppity nigger you couldn't find twixt here and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Ask him a question, say you ask him, "Mr. Frobinnigus, sir, what do the word 'trial' mean?" He'd rear his shoulders back and say, "That there is the animosity of the scurrilous elements of propitiosity over the irrigational tragedy of the plexus."

"It was a tragedy, alright. A *great* tragedy. Here was a bunch of niggers what couldn't tell you the difference between a summons and a persimmons elected to office over the few intelligent white folks what was left in the State. I hear tell you's being sent to school up North."

"Sir?"

"I said I hear tell you's being sent to school up North."

"Yes, sir. North Carolina."

"Young Master was killed in North Carolinna. My daddy was killed at Bull Run. Eat up, son. Have some more biscuits."

"Thank you, sir."

"How's your coffee?"

"Sir?"

"What's the matter, son? Losing your hearing? Have some more coffee."

"My daddy said I wasn't to drink but one cup a day," I said. The old man didn't even look at me. When he'd poured me another cup he went on.

"Old Master come back from the war looking mighty poorly. He'd lost twenty pounds at the least, and his skin was right yellowish. He'd had the fever. There won't a nigger on the place what won't glad to see him back safe, because we was all mighty liking to Old Master. One day he gathered all the niggers in front of the big house—there was a conch shell what the supervisor used to blow—and he says, "Today you is as free as I is. That is the law of the land. You is free to stay on here and work for wages, or you is free to go wheresomever you please. The choice is yourn. Do what you think best, and God bless you all." Then he goes inside the house with tears rolling down his cheeks.

"The niggers didn't know what Old Master means. Some of them thought he'd done gone plumb crazy. They all got to whispering to one another; then the field niggers ambled on back to the field like they always did, and the house niggers got to crying and hollering. That night they held a meeting 'mongst theyselves. Out of the one hundred and fourteen peoples Old Master had, eighty-four elected to stay on and work for him, with or without wages. The rest of them went North. My black mammy and two half-brothers went North, and I ain't seen or heard a word from them since. But to this day I can tell a field nigger from a house nigger. Field niggers walk like they ain't got a care in the world, and house niggers is right nervous and prissy-like, most like a white man. You is a house nigger. Eat up, son.

"Don't you be letting nobody put no race problem foolishness in your head up North; else you'll be just like Conscrucious. The first thing you got to learn about the race problem is that there ain't no race problem. People ain't like cattle or hosses what you can breed and put labels on. And people ain't like cattle or hosses what you can own, neither. Can't no man own no other man, son. He can *think* he owns him, but he can't own him. Ask any white man alive what freedom is and the first thing he'll do is set down and write a book about it. Eat up, son, I got things to do," the old man said, and stopped talking just as suddenly as he'd started. As I was leaving he said, "On July 14th, 1940, I'll be a hundred and one years old; so I ain't got much longer to stay on God's earth. It's all yours, son. It's all yours."

When I got home my father said, "Where you been all this time, Aaron?"

"I been over at Old Man Maypeck's," I said.

"Didn't I tell you that old man is crazy?"

"Yes sir," I said. "You sure did."

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BLACK ORPHEUS

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